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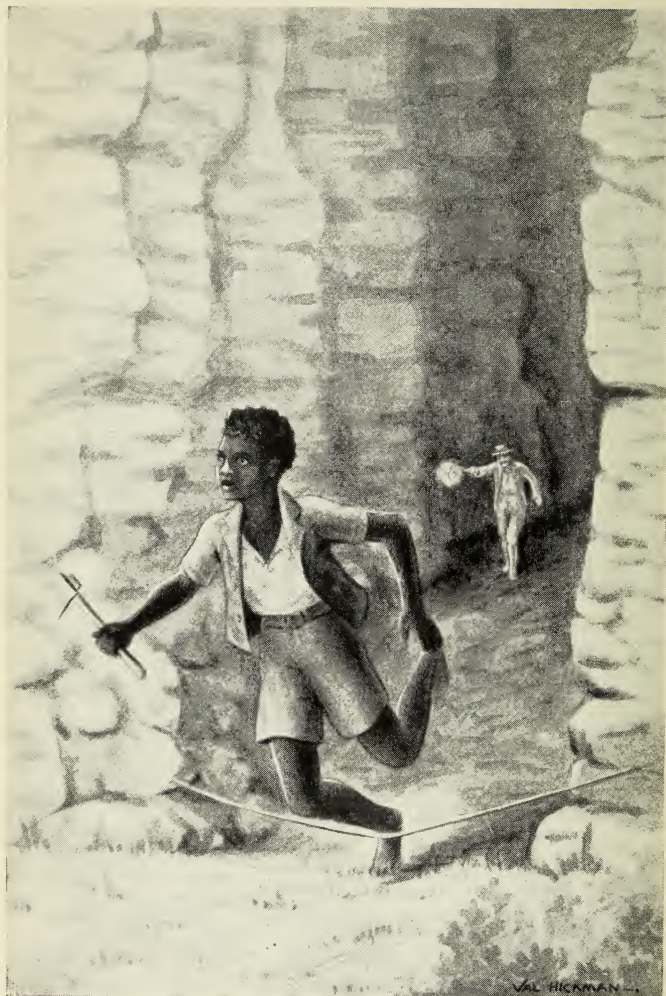
MUMMY OF MURRUMBAR



BY E. D. OAKLEY



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JIMMY OF "MURRUMBAR"
(See Page 153)

JIMMY OF "MURRUMBAR"

A Story of the Amazing
Ability and Fidelity of an
Australian Black Tracker

By
E. D. OAKLEY



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An Appreciation

THIS is an Australian story and is well told by the Author. Its setting is in an Australian landscape, with its varied scenery, its high and rugged mountains and almost inaccessible retreats, where the lawless could find some degree of safety from the avengers of justice. The events recorded centre round Station life, where Owners and Managers are much perturbed by sheep stealers and wild bushmen, who make raids, and create considerable panic in the country side. Under such conditions conflicts arise between opposing parties, and adventures are planned with the object of bringing criminals to justice. In connection with these expeditions Jimmy of Murrumbidgee, a black boy, becomes a prominent figure on account of his uncanny instinct in tracking, and in the wealth of information he possesses about bushcraft. This young blackfellow possesses as well, fine qualities of character brought about by contact with a devoted Missionary. The Author illustrates Jimmy's knowledge of bushcraft in many ways and gives a good deal of useful information about the habits and customs of the Aborigines. This information is pleasingly conveyed to the mind in the form of an interesting narrative. There is of course, a love story running through the book, but this is not so obtrusive as to take away the interest of the reader from the exploits of the young native tracker. This work calls attention to the valuable services rendered by the aborigines in cases of criminology. The Book is well worth reading, as it sets forth in a popular form, the intelligence and resourcefulness of the aborigines and clearly shows that it is worth while putting forth every effort to prevent the passing of such an interesting and intelligent race.

JOHN H. SEXTON,
Secretary,
Aborigines Friends' Association

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JIMMY OF “MURRUMBAR”

CHAPTER I.

An Unfortunate Introduction

“A fight ! A fight !”

At the sound of these words, with their ever magical power of attracting a crowd, we were quickly surrounded. It was unfortunate that I should find myself one of the principals in the affair, but it was not of my seeking. It had come to a head before I had time to realize the situation. I have always been impetuous, and when I saw a big rough-looking man, evidently slightly inflamed by drink, holding a diminutive aboriginal and punching him at the same time, I had to take action. I had arrived only that day at the small village of Gumvale, on duty as Ranger of the District. The area under my supervision included the Grampians Mountains, a series of rugged ranges in the Western District of Victoria, running almost from the town of Stawell to Hamilton, a district of about fifty miles. Gumvale is pleasantly situated near the main road between these towns, and is noted for its magnificent mountain views.

It was my first week in the position of Ranger, and my reason for being at the village was that a picnic sports-meeting had been arranged, and I wished to meet the people. The squatters especially were complaining of damage to the forest reserves, and of fires being started in the mountains, with a big risk of the fires reaching the plains and burning them out.

I received the information I required, and had enjoyed the unusual experience of a country sports-meeting, when I saw what I considered to be a brutal attack by a big man upon a small one. The big man, whom I afterwards learnt went by the name of Red Walton, was in the act of drawing back his fist to deliver another blow to the young blackfellow, when I caught his arm. Immediately his attention was diverted to the one who had dared to interfere.

"Who the devil are yer, and why don't yer mind your own business?" he said as he turned, livid with anger, from the frightened youth.

"My name is Wilson," I replied, "and it is always my business to prevent brutality."

"Yer —— city rat! If yer don't get out of my way yer stand a chance of 'aving your pretty face spoilt," he said with a sneer.

He was correct in suggesting that I was from the city, as I had left Melbourne where I had been employed in the lands office as clerk, only three days previously. I resigned from the clerical service to accept the non-clerical position of Ranger, as I did not like office work. Also I had given more attention to sport and boxing than to my duties, and, consequently, could not expect quick promotion. A few months previously I was the winner of an amateur

heavy-weight boxing championship. As my weight was twelve and a half stone, I did not fear Red Walton, although he must have weighed fully seventeen stone, and was a fine physical specimen of humanity, but a crowd having gathered, I decided to get away.

As soon as I turned, Red Walton jumped towards me with an oath, and pushed me hard into the young blackfellow whom I had just rescued. I was not hurt, but the blackboy, whose name was Jimmy, fell heavily and seemed in great pain. I immediately turned to Walton and started to throw off my coat and collar, and this caused the cry :

"A fight ! A fight !"

A ring was at once formed by the crowd, and the fight started. I could see by the attitude and style of the big fellow, whose general appearance strongly suggested the typical bully of the bush, that he had absolute confidence in his ability to thrash "the city rat." Unfortunately for me, the conditions were not as I would have preferred them, as apart from the fact that I was used to gloves, the ground was uneven and the light deceptive. It was the latter that helped to bring the short fight to an end. The tall trees were throwing shadows on us one moment, and we were in the sunshine the next. I remember being partly dazzled by the sun and stumbling slightly, and before I could recover, I received a remarkably heavy right-handed blow on the temple. It was like a kick from a horse, and I immediately saw stars, fell, and was counted out. When I came round I remember hearing derisive laughter, and somebody saying :

"What the silly fool put his hands up for, beats

me." The crowd was dispersing, but a few remained to sympathize, and the last of these was Jimmy, who simply said :

"You good fella, me no forget."

Little did I think that the sentiments partly expressed in these few words were to alter the whole course of my life.

As the sports were now over, I walked slowly to the one hotel in the village, where I had taken a room, and threw myself on the bed, more depressed and disappointed than I had ever been in the course of the twenty-three years of my life. I sometimes think that the hour I spent there utterly dejected, in self-examination, changed me from an irresponsible youth to a serious-minded man. A few hours before I had considered that, although I had not been a success as a clerk, I was a first-class athlete. Especially did I believe I was a finished boxer, but the first man of whom I ran foul in a small country village, had quickly proved his superiority. Also he had humiliated me in the presence of the men with whom I had to mix in the future, and I knew that for a time at least I must be an object of derision throughout the locality.

The effect of the heavy blow was showing on my face, and my head was aching and dizzy.

Although the evening was cool, I felt as if I must get out into the open air, and as the grand annual Sports Dance in the little hall was evidently about to commence, I determined to dawdle through the bush, and get as close as I could to the hall without being observed. I had no desire to suffer the further humiliation of having my partly closed eye and swollen face made a butt for the tongues of local wits.

As I approached the hall I drew closer than I had intended, as the music and dancing in the strange surroundings was a new experience, and not without a fascination. Then I heard a man's voice, and soon saw the speaker was Red Walton. He was speaking in a loud and boastful way of his victories when, unfortunately, he caught sight of me, and laughed as he said :

"'ere comes the city rat who couldn't keep awake long enough ter make a little entertainment fer the boys."

Once again my impulsiveness goaded me on, and without giving the matter a moments consideration, I stepped up to the crowd and looking at Walton, said :

"I have never known a skite to be any good yet, but anyone can fluke a win now and again."

He replied with a sneer :

"By the look of your dial, yer never fluked one."

"I think I have beaten better men than you," I answered, "and I hope you will give me the chance to show that, big and all as you are, you are not unbeatable."

While I was putting on a bold front, I was begining to feel that I was not making a very good start in the district. I knew that one holding a position of some importance should not be engaging in fights with the scum of the place. Also they would lower me in the estimation of the more respectable, whose friendship I desired to cultivate. Fate seemed to be pushing me into it, first, by leading me to witness the assault on the blackboy, and now by bringing me within hearing of Walton's hurtful boasting. How

could I have listened to this, and sneaked away without taking notice? I, of course, expected him to accept the challenge, but must admit that I felt no thrill of pleasure when he replied :

"Right-o my bung-eyed beauty, fer two pins I would churn the rest of your baby dial now, yer ——, come along 'ere any time termorrow, and I'll be 'ere ter fill up the other pretty little peeper." His continued reference to my city-bred appearance nettled me, but I felt that, to do myself justice, I must not be impulsive. Time would help me in more ways than one. A couple of weeks in the country would strengthen me and harden my hands, so I replied,

"Tomorrow would no doubt suit you very well, but I am a stranger here, and would like to feel my way a bit first. Make it this day fortnight and I'll be here."

"I'll bet a bob or two ter a used up chew of tobaccer, that 'e'll be back in the city before that, servin' out pretty ribbons," said Walton, with a loud coarse laugh.

"I'll serve out all I've got, here at nine a.m., this day fortnight," I replied, and turned back into the bush, followed by the jeering laughs of Walton and his rough looking mates.

Afterwards I found that, although the men of the district did not openly show their aversion to the mountain bully, as they called him, most of them really detested him, and hoped for his downfall. Fortunately, one of these men had fought the bully, and though beaten, could give me advice.

"My boy," he said, "you have taken on a big thing in offering battle to Red, for he has never been

beaten, as far as I can learn, and his punch, as you know, is like the blow of a sledge-hammer. I like your pluck, but am sorry you are having a second try. My name is Jack Ryan, and if I can be of any assistance to you, don't hesitate to ask for it."

"Thank you, Jack," I replied, "I am not afraid, but if you can tell me anything you learned of his tactics, when you fought him, I would be grateful."

"Well, that is easily told. He seems to depend mainly on a terrific right swing, and to use his left chiefly as a guard. What makes him extra hard to beat is his strength, and the remarkable way he can take punishment without weakening. It's not much use shooting at his head, as you might as well punch a ram, and besides it would knock the divil out of your hands. Your only hope is to try and weaken him with body blows."

I thanked him for the information, which I felt sure I could turn to some use.

For the next few days my appetite was poor, and a depression seemed to have settled on me. However, in a short time, the effect of the blow wore off, and I was able to feel more composed. Mountain climbing, swimming, ball-punching and running backwards, were my chief exercises, and as the time approached, I was feeling less worried about the outcome of the event. While doing this, I was not neglecting the duties of my office, as I was gaining some knowledge of the district that had been placed under my control.

Two days before the date arranged, for the combat, I was hailed by a lanky looking bushman :

"Hey mate, I suppose you will want a referee and a time keeper."

I replied that I thought it would be fairer all round, although, truth to tell, I believed that it was I who would reap the most benefit, if these officials understood fair play, and were strong enough to enforce it. I asked him if he could suggest anyone who would be willing to act.

"There's Heady Rogers, the hawker, who will be here that morning. He knows a thing or two about using his paws, and is big enough to get his own way."

"Is he a pal of Walton?" I asked.

"He's everybody's pal, and a decent old sport," he replied. And so the arrangements were gradually completed.

CHAPTER II.

The Fight

The morning arrived, and I arose early. Although I tried to keep my thoughts from dwelling overmuch on the approaching encounter, I found it impossible to put it from my mind. I seemed to have no appetite for my breakfast, but I forced myself to partake of a light meal, as I did not want my strength to fail me.

Then I commenced to get ready for the fight. All the time the thought kept coming to my mind: "You must win, keep your head, you cannot receive another thrashing, or you will be looked upon as a waster and a fool."

Then the vision of the angry bully rose up before my mind's eye, and I seemed to feel again the stunning force of his punch. For a brief space my courage seemed to fail me, then I said to myself: "You must win, play the waiting game, and when your chance comes, smash with all your might."

After a short walk through a bush lane I arrived at the local sports ground, which was quite an unpretentious place with a small roughly-built pavilion. On drawing closer I found a group of men, also the

inevitable mongrel dogs which usually accompanied their masters on their outings. A ring was marked out on the ground with an axe, and just as it was finished, Red Walton and several of his supporters could be seen coming leisurely along the bush track. The spirit of the party was that of unbridled hilarity. Red strolled up to the waiting crowd as jauntily as if it were his wedding day, his hat at a rakish angle.

"'ullo boys," he said, "where's the city rat?"

"Right here Red!" replied several of them in chorus.

"Well, let me at him," said Red, "I'll soon show 'im what I can do ter a city mug."

"'old 'ard Red," said one of the men. "This 'ere fight is going to be run proper with a referee and a time-keeper."

"None of that bunk for me. All I want is ter carve 'im up."

"No fear Red, we're 'ere to see that 'e gets a fair go, and we have appointed Heady Rogers referee, and Tommy Dale time-keeper."

Tommy was provided with a bullock bell with which to mark the commencement and termination of the rounds. Peeling off our coats and vests, Walton and I advanced into the center of the ring. Red Walton, whose attitude was that of intense contempt, looked a formidable opponent. He was about six feet four inches high and very strongly built. I noticed with some satisfaction that, as almost invariably occurs with ponderous men of thirty-five years or over, he was thickening a little around the waist line. He had a red sunburnt face with beetling eyebrows, and a short scrubby beard.

His small beady eyes flashed a glance of hatred, ming'ed with contempt upon me as I stood face to face with him. Then the bullock bell was rung as a signal to commence.

The violence of his attack seemed like the charge of an infuriated bull. I made no attempt to fight back. For the time it was my policy to avoid the wild rushes and whirling arms of my opponent, while looking for his weaknesses. His method was simple enough, and his tremendous strength was his main asset. His attack consisted simply of a terrific lunge with his right, while using his left mostly as a guard, but his intention was always obvious. Previous to delivery he would take two or three short shuffling steps forward, draw his right arm well back, and "whish." He might as well have waved a flag.

During the first round most of the onlookers had let themselves go in one continuous burst of laughter. It seemed as though only myself and two or three others were taking the matter seriously.

As the fight went on I noticed Walton's chief failing was that he left his guard open after delivering his powerful blow.

Then the bell rang, and we sat on nearby stumps which served as our corners. There were no seconds officially appointed, but Jimmy the blackboy stood at hand ready to give any assistance I required. Flushed with his exertions, Red Walton looked more savage than ever, and he seemed more infuriated when he realized that the task of finishing me off, was not as easy as he had anticipated.

A ring of the bell and we were at it again. Spurred on by the raucous urgings of his irresponsible

advisers, Walton at times threw caution to the winds and this gave me a chance to accept the openings he presented. One rush from Walton brought the spectators to their toes, for he dashed on me with both fists whirling wildly, and try as I would, I could not avoid some of his blows.

"Red's got him! Red's got him!" shouted some of his supporters, as he landed a heavy blow to my body which sent me staggering backwards. Tripping over a dog on the edge of the ring I fell to the ground. In a moment Walton was upon me, but before he could strike another blow, the strong hands of Heady Rogers seized him from behind, and he was dragged by Rogers and Ryan into the ring, cursing and shouting defiance.

"Let me go, yer cows," he yelled, "and I'll break every bone in 'is —— body."

In spite of his struggles, Walton, as the bell again sounded the end of the round, was forced to stay in his corner, until another ring of the bell proclaimed the renewal of hostilities. Although somewhat shaken at first by my fall, I had now quite recovered, but Walton was still panting from the effect of his efforts. As he bounded towards me like some beast of prey pouncing on its victim, his fists were flying wildly. Then as he made a particularly vigorous swipe, I ducked, and coming in with a strong left, I landed a solid punch which soon closed up his right eye. Now I began to have the advantage, but Red Walton was by no means beaten, as he seemed to thrive on punishment. I determined to attempt a climax before the bell rang again, and with that end in view, worked to the centre of the ring.

Then getting in closer than I dared before, I drove hard to the already battered ribs over his heart. Although he was gradually weakening I could not finish him before the bell rang again.

"Shure it's a wonderful sight," said an excitable old Irishman. "It shure minds me of me youth, when I fit every spalpeen for miles around, and divil a wan could hould a candle to me at all at all."

I now felt confident of victory, and knew that only an accident could rob me of it. A brief respite, and we were at it again. Red Walton's breath was coming in great gasps and his blows lacked weight. His right no longer held any terrors for me, so I decided to go in and finish him off. He was a treacherous opponent however, and in his fury any discretion he might have possessed was thrown to the wind. Then all of a sudden, big Red, panting and cursing, seemed to go mad, and made a vicious kick that would have ended the struggle had it landed fairly. But I instinctively divined his intention, and bringing into action a little trick I had learned at school, I backed, grabbed his heel, and forcing his leg above his head brought him down with a resounding whack on the hard ground. He sat up shaking his head, then slowly rising, snarled:

"Yer rotten dog."

I smiled at the inconsistency.

"Wot are yer grinning at?" he questioned with an oath, as he staggered rather than rushed at me with arms swaying limply. There was only one thing to do and next instant the mountain bully had sagged to the ground, his chest gave one convulsive heave and he lay still as a rock.

The referee stood watching while filling his pipe ; this done he gave his decision in these words :

" Better get him home boys."

Then turning to me and offering his hand, he said :

" I had a notion that perhaps he had met his ' Waterloo ' ! " Then he turned away and with a few prodigious strides was lost to view.

Jimmy's congratulation was, " You win 'im Boss, no more 'im mountain bully."

I fully expected to hear a flood of blasphemy and wild challenges when the fallen man recovered, but was relieved when, as he was lifted up by some of his companions, he walked dejectedly away with lowered head, and great shoulders hunched. I could not help drawing a mental comparison between this and his coming.

CHAPTER III.

Jimmy Tested

I was destined to see more of Jimmy, and the more I saw of the quiet mannered youth, the more I liked him, and appreciated his ability and sterling qualities. He was of a slight build, being smaller than the average aboriginal. Always bare-footed, and dressed in jacket and short pants, he was a well-known personality throughout the district. One rather remarkable thing about him was the thinness of his legs, and yet he was very athletic, and possessed splendid stamina. His feet, like those of most aboriginals, were pointed slightly in, and this was a big advantage to him when following a very narrow trail through, perhaps, a dense forest. As I got to know him better, I was struck by the fact that he seemed to possess a dual personality. At times I would regard him simply as an aboriginal true to type, at other times he seemed remarkably intelligent, with a high sense of honour, and far in advance of the average Australian aboriginal. This, no doubt, was due to his association with a missionary in his boyhood.

He was acting as groom for Mr. Graham, owner of "Murrumbar," one of the largest stations in the district.

On the day after the fight, I rode out to the homestead, as Mr. Graham had lodged complaints against the timber-cutters who lived on the fringe of the mountains, and I wished further information. I arrived about noon and was invited to dine with the family, consisting of the owner, his wife, and daughter. A wealthy English tourist named Clements, was a visitor at the homestead at the time of my visit. Mr. Graham introduced me to the others as "Mr. Wilson, the hero of yesterday's fight," and I was surprised at the sincere tone of their congratulations, but it appeared that they knew the mountain bully and were pleased at his defeat.

Miss Graham further surprised me by saying :

"I heard you fought in defence of Jimmy, and it will please you to know he is well worth fighting for, apart from his inability to defend himself from a giant like Walton."

"Why did Walton attack him?" I asked. Mr. Graham replied :

"Jimmy assisted the previous Ranger to prove Walton guilty of stealing a quantity of valuable wattle bark from the Government reserves near the mountains."

"I hear that Jimmy has been educated. Is that correct?"

"He is educated to this extent," replied Mr. Graham, "that he can understand almost anything that is said to him, whereas the average blackfellow could not. He was being taught by a missionary,

for whom Jimmy was acting as a groom, but when he died, the teaching ended. As far as his ability as a tracker is concerned, he is the real thing, and I doubt if he has a superior in Australia."

I noticed that Mr. Clements, who wore a monacle, and was a stand-offish pompous individual, seemed very much interested on learning of Jimmy's ability as a tracker. Mr. Graham was enlarging on the cleverness of blacktrackers to track men or animals, when Mr. Clements said :

"I have always understood that the natives of this country are of a very low order of intelligence, and are not as capable as the North American Indians "

"Our Jimmy is just a dear," broke in Miss Graham, "and I can't imagine anyone saying that of an American Indian."

"Of course it will be conceded," continued Mr. Clements, "that the American Indian has no equal in following a trail."

"I thought so once," replied Mr. Graham, "but since I have seen Jimmy at work I am satisfied that the Australian blacktracker has no superior in the world. His eyesight is uncanny, and his sense of smell almost marvellous. The Red Indian makes a practice of placing his ear to the ground, but the blacktracker never does, because there is no need for it, as his sense of hearing is so keen."

"Travellers of renown have failed to notice these qualities in your proteges," persisted the visitor, "but it is well known that the American Indians set a high ideal for their youth. An Indian youth cannot claim the privileges of manhood until he has slain an eagle."

"Kill an eagle!" almost shouted Mr. Graham, "Jimmy could kill one every morning before breakfast if he wished to."

"Do you mean to tell me there are eagles in this country?"

"The finest in the world, with a wing spread of up to nine feet," replied Mr. Graham, "and Jimmy is just the one to deal with them, especially when they come around at lambing time."

After some further talk on tracking animals, including foxes, Mr. Clements said:

"I will bet you five pounds, Graham, that your man Jimmy cannot go to the mountains this afternoon, without a dog or gun, and capture a large eaglehawk and fox for my inspection."

"It's a bet," said Mr. Graham.

As soon as lunch was over, we all left the dining room to interview Jimmy, who came from the direction of the men's hut when called.

"Jimmy," said Mr. Graham, "I want you to go to the mountains this afternoon, without a gun or dog and capture a full grown fox and eaglehawk; can you do it?"

"Yes, boss, you want 'em alive?"

At this question Mr. Clements laughed and answered.

"Yes," and then turning to his host said:

"How about making that bet ten pounds?"

"Can you capture them alive, Jimmy?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Yes, Boss."

"Well, as you say you can do it, I will accept the bet, and you get the winnings."

The young tracker lost no time in preparing for his mission, and we watched him as he gathered his necessities together. They appeared to be one rabbit trap and two empty sacks. Although Jimmy was noted for his lack of words, I soon learned that he did his share of thinking. Before starting he turned to Mr. Graham and said:

"You come longa rocky bluff."

We all smiled, for it was apparent, if he did secure the game, he could not carry it home. It was arranged that the host and his guest would drive to the place mentioned, while, at the last minute it was suggested that I should accompany Jimmy, but not assist him. As Jimmy and I were leaving the homestead, Mrs. Graham said to me:

"We will expect you, Mr. Wilson, to stay with us until tomorrow."

While I was hesitating, Miss Graham said:

"I suppose you are fond of music?"

This remark influenced me in my reply to Mrs. Graham,

"I accept, with pleasure, your kind invitation." And to Miss Graham,

"I am already looking forward to some music this evening."

I noticed her parents addressed her as Beryl, and she seemed in every way to fit in with her surroundings. A little above medium height, slender, and with wavy brown hair, and large grey eyes that looked straight into yours in a way that told of reliability and sincerity. I noticed that it mattered not to whom she spoke, those eyes shone with the same deep questioning gaze. I guessed that she lived a great

deal in the open, and was probably a horsewoman, also that her indoor accomplishments were above the average.

But returning to Jimmy. To reach the foothills of the Grampians, we had to walk in a westerly direction, about four miles, and as the wind was blowing from the south, he hoped to scent a fox during the journey. As we walked along, Jimmy told me his father used to bring him the feet of animals and claws of birds to play with, when he was only a baby about two years old. He had started tracking animals when a little boy not more than five years old. At about this time, his father had encouraged him to track bull-ants over sand-drifts. At seven years of age he could track animals and snakes without any fear of losing his way.

"How would you know which way the snake was travelling?" I asked.

Stooping down to some loose sand, he made a mark about two feet long, and then made the sand slightly higher on one side of the mark and said,

"Snake 'im go longa that way."

Evidently the snake when travelling through the sand throws it slightly higher on one side of its trail, and this was how Jimmy knew which way the snake was travelling.

The walk was longer than I expected, as the mountains appeared to be closer than they really were. After walking some distance in silence I turned to my companion and said, "I suppose you have seen some remarkable sights when walking silently in the mountains?"

"One day me see white fox, red eye."

"Did you try to capture it?"

"Yes, 'im run in log."

Jimmy then told me that he had blocked up the mouth of the log, and hurried back to camp to tell his father. It was too late to return to the fox that evening, so it was arranged that they would leave first thing in the morning. However, when they got to the log next morning it was found that the fox had escaped. The log, where it rested on the damp ground had decayed, and the fox had bitten the rotten wood through, and when it reached the soft earth, had no trouble in escaping.

As we continued our journey Jimmy informed me that foxes were fairly plentiful near the mountains. With reasonable luck he expected to locate one before he reached the foothills, but his luck appeared to be out.

We had covered most of the distance without any results, when Jimmy stopped and looked towards a hollow log. He knew there was no fox there, but a rabbit was necessary to assist him to catch the eaglehawk, and his sense of smell told him one was in the log. He knelt at the opening of the log and saw that the rabbit was about seven feet distant. He then walked to a sapling growing nearby, and cut a rod from it about six feet in length, which he thinned at one end. Pressing the thin end of the rod against the fur of the rabbit which was crouching against the side of the log, Jimmy commenced twisting the rod. The idea was to twist it until it became entangled in the fur and skin, when it would be easy to pull the rabbit out. After one failure the rod became firmly caught, and the rabbit was pulled out and placed in the bag

alive. Jimmy told me that he had secured many rabbits in this manner, using as a rule a length of fencing wire, and that it never fails.

But time was passing, and the little tracker had to find a fox. He had confidence about securing the monster eagle, but Renard being the most cunning of all animals was a harder proposition. He now commenced walking quickly in the most likely places, when all of a sudden he came to an abrupt stop. He had detected a faint smell of fox coming with the wind, and he knew from the slight scent that the animal must be a considerable distance away. Starting to walk south he must have covered two hundred yards or more before he stooped, and looking into a hollow log, saw a large dog fox. There was an advantage in the fact that it was a dog fox. Jimmy knew quite well, as every bushman knows, that a vixen when molested will seize the first opportunity to dash away from its hiding place, but a dog fox usually refuses to move. Without any hurry the blackboy looked about for a small log to place in the opening of the larger one, and soon had the fox bottled up to his satisfaction.

He now had to catch a wedge-tailed eagle alive, but although this immense bird would scare most people, Jimmy considered it an easy task. He had frequently caught eagles by placing rabbit traps alongside dead lambs, and therefore it was not an unusual occurrence. He now climbed to a rocky peak where he knew the eagles made their home. Before advancing into the open, he broke a branch off a bush, and placed it over his head as he did not want to scare the eagles floating in the clear air

hundreds of feet above him. Taking the rabbit out of the bag he secured it by his kangaroo hide belt to a stake against a rocky ledge. Then he made a small depression, set the trap in it, and covered it with a few leaves. With the bush still shielding him from the fierce eyes above, he sought cover. His plan was quickly successful for the eagles depend on their eyes for their food. Within a few minutes a monster eagle alighted, and advanced boldly towards its seemingly helpless prey. Just as it struck at the rabbit the huge bird stepped on the plate of the concealed trap. Snap went the spring, and Jimmy's task was now easy as one of the eagle's cruel looking talons was firmly gripped by the steel jaws of the trap. Jimmy ran from cover carrying a bag and the rod he had used on the rabbit, but the eagle commenced to show fight. Jimmy had expected this, for he had made a loop with some fibre from rushes, and tied it to the heavy end of the rod. With a quick movement, he pinned the eagle's fierce looking head down with it, and promptly threw the mouth of the bag over the doubly held eagle. A short struggle and Jimmy had won, for the eagle was in the bag, and when measured later on was found to be seven feet six inches from tip to tip of wings. As soon as the eagle was captured, Jimmy's task was over, and he signalled me to come nearer.

As we sat resting, Jimmy informed me that the fox is a champion hunter, and that in every way it seemed to be superior to a dog when on the trail of a hare or rabbit. He also pointed out that a dog, when hunting, sometimes comes to a closed burrow containing young rabbits. The mother rabbit when leaving the burrow

scratches earth over the mouth of it, and makes it appear as if no burrow were there. A dog, when it finds one of these burrows, usually works from the mouth of the burrow, and digs it right out, a distance of perhaps six or eight feet. The fox being an expert hunter makes a neat hole perhaps a foot deep, directly over the young rabbits, and thereby saves a great deal of time and labour.

CHAPTER IV.

Murder of the Station Manager

That evening at "Murrumbar" we were a merry party. Mr. Clements, in particular, seemed remarkably well pleased with the day's events and declared himself convinced of the remarkable prowess of the blackboy. We were about to have some music and Miss Graham was seated at the piano when we were surprised to hear a loud knock. When Mr. Graham opened the door, he was further surprised to see a trooper who had some rather startling news. Without wasting time on preliminary remarks, he said:

"A desperate bushranger named Hall was seen making for the Grampians, and a reward of five hundred pounds is to be paid for his capture, dead or alive. He shot dead a policeman a few weeks ago, in the north-eastern part of Victoria, and the Government is anxious to effect his capture."

As the trooper intended warning others, he did not waste any time but quickly took his departure. The exciting news acted as a check on my pleasure only for a few minutes, as I like listening to good singing and Miss Graham's voice was cultured and

sweet. Our voices when we sang together seemed to blend well, and I was only too pleased to sing with so fair a partner.

When I said goodbye the following morning, an open invitation was extended to me to visit "Murrumbar," when it suited me to do so. Naturally the kindness and hospitality shown to one who was a stranger made a deep and pleasing impression on me.

I had now to return to my headquarters at Stawell.

A few days after my visit to "Murrumbar," I was surprised to see Jimmy come into the office, and from his serious expression and manner, I knew something was amiss. He told me some of the facts, and the rest I learnt when I reached the station homestead.

It seemed that soon after I left "Murrumbar," Miss Graham had gone to visit a girl friend for a few days at a neighboring station. As a rule she rode a splendid blood mare, named Ladybird, when visiting neighbors. On this occasion she had driven over, leaving Ladybird running loose in a small paddock about one mile from the homestead. Two days later, Mr. Stevens, manager of "Murrumbar," and one of the station hands were repairing a gate on the western extremity of the station. Mr. Stevens, looking toward the homestead, said :

"Jack, who's that coming along on horseback past the big dam?"

"Can't say Boss, but whoever it is, he's in a deuce of a hurry," and he exclaimed excitedly, "If that's not Ladybird I'm a Dutchman!"

Shading his eyes with his hand the manager said :

"You're right Jack, it is Ladybird, and nobody

has permission to touch that mare. There's some dirty work going on here, I'm thinking." The manager continued.

"Whoever the rider is, he appears to be making for this gate, and as he does not appear to have noticed us we will keep out of sight." And the men stepped into a clump of trees near the gate. It was evident the rider was completely unaware of the close proximity of the station men. He appeared to be a man approaching middle age, not big but strongly built, dark skinned and of a passionate appearance. When he reached the closed gate, he jumped lightly to the ground, and hurriedly unhooked the chain. Just then the manager rushed forward, and grasping the bridle reins demanded,

"What are you doing with this mare?"

"What the blazes do yer think? Perhaps I'm goin' ter run 'er in the Melbourne Cup. I'm in a 'urry, and there's no time to argue. Take yer 'and off that bridle and get out of my way or you'll be sorry."

"I would be more sorry if I let every bounder bluff me," retorted the manager.

Just here the second man thought it was time he took a hand, and stepped towards the others. Mr. Stevens, now satisfied that it was time to act decisively, attempted to drag Ladybird away from the stranger, but he hung tenaciously to the bridle. The rough treatment caused the overwrought mare to rear and plunge. At the end of the struggle she was in the possession of Mr. Stevens.

"Now get away before I change my mind, and deal with you," said the manager.

"Yes, I'm goin', but on the mare," replied the stranger.

As the manager attempted to mount the dancing mare, the stranger's hand flew to his hip pocket. Jack, suspecting his vile intention, snapped out:

"None of that you dirty dog," and grappling with the thief attempted to bring him to the ground. But he was no match for the stranger in strength and agility, and Jack was underneath when they hit the ground. By this time Mr. Stevens had safely mounted, and urged the mare towards the struggling pair, hoping to be able to assist his mate. He had no weapon other than a dog chain in his pocket, and taking this out, he said:

"You vile cur, get up or I'll smash your head in." As he swung the chain, Jack shouted:

"Look out Boss, he's got a gun."

The call was too late. A revolver shot rang out, and immediately the unfortunate manager swayed in the saddle, as if badly hit. He fell forward, convulsively grasping the mare's mane, but gradually rolling to the side. The thief noticing this, with no more delay, sprang forward and seized the bridle rein, just as the manager fell with a heavy thud to the ground, a red stain already showing on his shirt front. Covering the prostrate and bewildered Jack with his revolver, the desperado steadily led the mare to the gate. After calmly pushing it open with his body, he leapt on the mare, and heading in the direction of the mountains, was quickly lost to view in the scrub.

CHAPTER V.

"Crossing the Rubicon"

On learning some of these particulars from Jimmy, I at once thought of the bushranger of whom the trooper had spoken to Mr. Graham, and now lost no time in finding out whether the police possessed a photograph of Hall. Fortunately one had been sent from Melbourne, as soon as it was known that the bushranger had sought refuge in the Grampians.

The sergeant in charge lent me the photo, and arranged for a trooper to accompany Jimmy and me back to "Murrumbar."

On our arrival at the homestead, we found that a great gloom had settled on all, as the popular and able manager was dying. When the photograph was produced, both men recognized it as being that of the man who fired the shot. Mr. Graham seemed aged since I saw him a few days previously, and his daughter was almost distracted with grief, as the manager and she had been great friends since her childhood.

At ten o'clock that night the doctor came into the dining room where we were assembled, and quietly

informed us that the patient was dead. I had never met the late manager, but I had a deep regard for Miss Graham and would have gone to great lengths to have eased her burden. She was pale and looked ill, and I found a great loathing take possession of me when I thought of Hall.

Since the manager's death the whole affair had taken on a more serious aspect as far as the police were concerned. The trooper returned to Stawell without delay, and the sergeant came to "Murrumbar" and was present at the funeral.

As soon as this sad ceremony was over, a meeting of the men was held to consider what action could be taken to bring the murderer to justice. The sergeant was prepared to lead a party into the mountains if Jimmy, who knew the mountains better than any other man, would act as guide.

Jimmy, like most aboriginals, did not like man-hunting, also he did not like the police, as years before, they had accused a friend of his of having stolen some sheep, when Jimmy knew he was innocent. Since that time Jimmy would not help the police.

When the sergeant heard Jimmy's refusal he had to admit his helplessness. But Miss Graham was not satisfied and, after she learnt that the sergeant had sworn me in as a special constable in case I came into contact with Hall, sent word she would like to see me.

I found her sitting in an armchair on the wide verandah. At her feet lay her favourite collie dog, but apparently she was unconscious of its sympathetic glances. Usually she was all vitality and animation, but now she reminded me of a beautiful flower beginning to droop and fade. The garden close by was

radiant with rose bushes and flowering shrubs in full bloom. Beyond it were green valleys and further afield could be seen the tree covered foothills nestling at the feet of the smoky blue mountain peaks. Fleecy clouds drifting across the azure sky completed a picture of rare beauty, yet I knew that for once she was blind to the glorious vistas before her. She did not lift her head as I approached, but seemed partly stunned by the first big tragedy in her life. I was surprised when I saw that her face was drawn and pallid, as though years had passed instead of a few days. Her agitation seemed to increase as I approached, and her appearance upset me. I could only mutter, clumsily enough it seemed to me,

"This is a painful affair, Miss Graham." She gazed at me intently. "Could anything be more awful! Poor Mr. Stevens, the most loyal friend one could possibly have had. If I were a man I would feel it a duty I owed Mr. Stevens to have the murderer brought to justice, but what can a woman do? How often have I wished that I had a brother, but never as I do now. No never!" she repeated, shaking her head emphatically. Then showing the only sign of impulsiveness that I had ever noticed in her manner, she grasped me by the arm, and in a broken voice said:

"Mr. Stevens lost his life in trying to save Lady-bird for me." Then looking at me with tears in her eyes, she added, "Mr. Wilson, you already have my friendship, but if you could succeed in capturing Hall and bringing him to justice I should feel that in you I had a brother." Blushingly then, as if she feared she had shown undue familiarity, she released my arm,

but continued, "You will help, won't you?" There was intense pleading in her tone, and the beautiful grey eyes, swimming in tears, now wrung from me the desperate reply.

"Yes, Miss Graham, with every ounce of my power."

"But I am asking you to bring trouble on yourself and yours," she faltered sadly.

"My office is of such a nature that it is almost my bounden duty to at least assist, and I have been invested with some authority. Perhaps I can make use of this in your service."

Up to this moment, I had never loved a girl, but as I looked into the sweet face, tremulous with feeling, it appealed to me as being more attractive and winsome than ever before. Then to my astonishment I suddenly realized I was in love, and hopeless love at that. Perhaps it was the thought of the hopelessness of the love that made me desperate, for I answered. "I will arrange to leave for the mountains without delay."

"But surely you won't go single-handed?" she asked.

"Have you forgotten that we have a capable friend who will not refuse his help?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why! Jimmy."

Jimmy's words on the day of the fight had come to my mind, "You good fella, me no forget," and I did not doubt that he would assist me.

That afternoon I had a talk with Jimmy, and finally in Mr. Graham's presence, arrangements were

made for Jimmy and me to leave for the mountains as soon as possible.

On the following day I let it be known in Gumvale that I intended leaving for Ararat by the coach next day, en route for Melbourne. To make it look more realistic, I remember dressing with great care on the day I was supposed to leave for Melbourne, so as to look as much like a city man as possible. I had a travelling bag packed with old clothes, given me by Mr. Graham, and had arranged to be ready for the coach half an hour before its time of departure. Promptly as arranged, Mr. Graham drove up to the hotel, and when he saw me waiting, called out :

"If you are bound for Ararat, don't wait for the coach but come with me for company."

I explained to the hotel people that I had an offer from Mr. Graham of a ride to Ararat, and that I would not wait for the coach. Mr. Graham drove about three miles along the quiet track, until we came to a deserted hut, near some dense scrub. There I left the buggy, changed my clothes, and handed the bag containing my good clothes to Mr. Graham.

CHAPTER VI.

In the Mountains

Jimmy had been waiting for me near the hut, and as he was to bring the food necessary for perhaps eight days in the heart of the mountains, I remember my disappointment at the small supply of provisions. All he had brought was a small bag of flour weighing perhaps ten pounds, one pound of tea, a tin of salt, and a tin of soda.

I soon learnt why he preferred travelling light, as the country quickly became rough, and difficult to walk over. We purposely avoided the well beaten tracks, because if we were seen the secret would be out, and our chance of success gone. As it was warm November weather, Jimmy did not bother about blankets, but he had brought two sleeping bags made of 'possum skins. We also carried a small grid-iron, billy can, tomahawk, spear and some string. Jimmy also carried what I thought was a bundle of feathers, but I soon found out that this was the wings of the eaglehawk recently caught by him. Of course I carried my revolver. As Hall was an expert bushman on his guard against capture,

our best chance of success would be to approach him from the rear. This meant that we would need to enter the mountains a considerable distance from where Jimmy imagined Hall would be located, and make our way into the mountains, and then work backwards.

I was soon impressed with Jimmy's bushcraft as, without a compass, he never lost his sense of direction. We were to camp at a small river in the mountains that night, and it was almost dusk before Jimmy decided that a wallaby would be a valuable addition to our larder. Being without boots, he walked silently. I walked about ten yards in the rear, and as silently as I possibly could, so as not to confuse Jimmy, who seemed ever alert, and listening for sounds which would warn us of detection or danger. I was surprised at the ease with which he obtained the wallaby.

When passing a tussock, he must have smelt the wallaby as it lay in hiding, and then quickly speared it. We had perhaps a quarter of a mile to go to reach our obscure camping ground, when Jimmy started to collect wood for the camp fire. As there was wood and bark everywhere, I could not understand why he did not wait to gather it until we arrived at the camp, but I soon learnt there was method in his actions.

On arrival at the camping ground, I picked what I thought would be a suitable place for the fire, but Jimmy shook his head, and made it in the midst of some thick trees. When the fire started to burn, I saw the reason of Jimmy's care in the selection of firewood. He had picked twigs from a tree belong-

ing to the acacia species of which there are many varieties in the mountains, and there was practically no smoke or smell, only flame. Then to make doubly sure that smoke from our camp would not be seen, he had made the fire in the midst of a thick clump of trees. If any smoke did rise, it would be scattered and dissolved in the dense leaves overhead, also the fire was not visible from a distance of a few yards.

It was the work of about half an hour to grill some of the best part of the wallaby which together with the damper, made of flour, salt, soda and water, tasted good after our long tramp.

I noticed that before Jimmy started his meal he had apparently bowed his head and asked a blessing on the food so I said to him :

"Jimmy, I hope you don't mind my asking it, but are you a Christian?"

"Yes," he replied, and took from an inside pocket of his jacket a tiny leather bag, containing a small edition of the New Testament, and opening it, pointed to the fly leaf on which was written :—

To Jimmy with love
from
his friend, Thos. Grant.

*"For the wages of sin is death, but
the gift of God is eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

"Who is Thomas Grant?" I asked.

"Mr. Grant take me longa 'im when father 'im dead."

"Was he the missionary?"

"Yes, 'im good man."

"What age were you when you went to live with him?"

"Me twelve years longa that time. Jacky my name. Mr. Grant 'im say, 'Big lot blackfella Jacky,' 'im call me Jimmy."

As darkness approached Jimmy seemed nervous, and afraid of the mountain forest in which we were camped. The aborigines do not like camping in the mountains, as they are afraid at night of evil spirits. Although Jimmy had been enlightened on these matters by a Christian Missionary, he could not overcome this weakness and superstition, handed down by his forefathers.

While we were partaking of our meal, and although I heard nothing, Jimmy jumped from the log on which he was sitting and said:

"Two 'orses comin' longa track, me see 'em."

This track was distant about half a mile from the river, and running parallel with it. Before I had time to make any remark, Jimmy had disappeared. He was not long away, and his first words on returning were:

"Me see Ladybird longa hack Red Walton."

"Are you sure it was Red Walton's hack?" I asked.

"Yes 'im 'igh back."

Evidently Jimmy had recognised Red Walton's hack by its roached back, even though the light was bad. Although the little tracker was satisfied that Hall was the rider of Ladybird, he had reason to believe that the outlaw's camp would be miles away. It was a surprise to me to know that Red Walton and

Hall were evidently friends, but fore-warned is fore-armed, and I was pleased with Jimmy's discovery.

The weather had been hot all day but the night was cool. I had expected a good night's sleep after my exertions, but swarms of insects, like tiny flies, were everywhere. Although they did not bite they kept me awake, almost the whole night, crawling over my face and hands.

It must have been about ten o'clock when I was startled by a loud and horrible scream. At first I thought I must be dreaming but again came the fearful cry, as if a woman was being strangled or murdered.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" I called, "Did you hear that awful scream?"

Jimmy seemed to wake out of a sound sleep, and said:

"Yes, 'im owl."

"No! No! I've heard an owl calling often. Wake up! It was no owl."

Then once again came the horrible scream.

"There," I said, "There's no owl about that."

"Yes, 'im eagle-owl."

"Do you mean to say that a bird called the eagle-owl made that dreadful noise?"

"Yes, me no like 'em, eat 'possum."

"Does it live on 'possum."

"Yes, no find 'possum, eat 'em rabbit," replied Jimmy, and then in a few seconds his regular breathing told me he was asleep.

Next morning, Jimmy was early astir, and we were soon on our way. We had not gone very far when Jimmy stopped and, pointing to a small patch of

level grass land about twenty yards off, said :

"Egg belonga emu there."

I had never seen an emu's nest, so I said that we would examine it, and I was delighted at seeing eleven large green eggs in a roughly made nest, little better than a large hole in the ground, about four feet in diameter. I asked Jimmy how he knew the nest was there, and he told me that an emu when leaving or approaching its nest always walked on the points of its toes, and that instead of the usual pad, only tiny marks as if made by spear points are visible. In this way the emu endeavoured to keep its nest from being discovered.

I expressed surprise at the size of the eggs, but Jimmy said, "Piccaninny (young) emu lay 'em egg, old emu 'im lay big one."

We took an egg for our mid-day meal, and at dinner time, before attempting to cook it, Jimmy held the big egg in his fingers with the pointed end up. Then he tossed it about five feet in the air, and made it spin by twirling his fingers as it left his hand. This was done to scramble the egg. When it was broken, Jimmy pointed out that an emu's egg has three layers of shell, the outer one being green, the next yellow, and the inner layer light green. He also told me that an emu did not have any particular season of the year for nesting, but was influenced by heavy rains and the weather, and that he had found eggs in all seasons of the year.

Our progress when we resumed was slow, because Jimmy, to avoid being seen, purposely kept to the low parts, and they were more difficult to travel through, as the scrub and undergrowth were more

dense than on the rocky and wind-swept hills.

Though I found walking over rough and broken country in light boots difficult, I was fortunate in having such a capable guide, and Jimmy was constantly proving his worth. We were crossing over a very deep and shady gorge, which had a small stream of water flowing through it. The banks on either side were very high, and in the gorge, to my surprise, wattle-blossom was just coming into bloom beneath the shade of very tall gum trees. The fact that the wattles would be blooming in summer, instead of winter, as in open country, had occupied my attention, but Jimmy was intensely practical. He had evidently noticed food in the form of eels in the small stream we had just passed over, for he said:

"You eat 'em eel?"

"Yes, when I get the chance."

"Me get some," he replied, and turned back to the water. I was interested in watching Jimmy's way of procuring eels, but there appeared to be no complications in it. He simply waited until an eel came swimming slowly by in the shallow water when, without any hurry, he caught the eel around the body, about six inches from its head, and drew it from the water. With his left hand he caught it near its tail, and twisted the eel into the shape of a horseshoe, when it became quite helpless.

"I could do that Jimmy," I said, and took his place at the water's edge, but although I was careful to get a good hold of an eel, it slipped through my hand without any apparent effort.

"Jimmy," I said, "I think that the eel you caught must have been sick, so I want you to catch another."

Jimmy grinned, and calmly waited for another eel to come along. As soon as one appeared, he caught it around the body, and without the least haste, drew it from the water.

"Well Jimmy, you win," I said, "Now teach me how it is done."

Jimmy, with a smile, pointed to some coarse sand near the edge of the water.

"Yes, I see the sand but what has it to do with catching the eels?"

"Takem sand in hand," said Jimmy.

I took some sand but was careful not to open my hand until I was about to grasp the eel, and sure enough, had no difficulty in preventing the eel from slipping through my hand. Before grilling the eels they had to be skinned and cleaned, and I was surprised to find in the stomach of one of the eels, a small eel about nine inches long.

"Look Jimmy," I exclaimed.

"Yes, eel eat eel likem snake eat snake."

"But do they always swallow their food whole?"

"Eel no teeth, snake no teeth, snake eatem rabbit longa fur, eel eatem bird longa feathers."

Jimmy also informed me that a large eel could swallow a bird the size of a parrot, and that a snake could swallow a young rabbit, fur, bones and all.

"Tell me this, Jimmy," I queried, "when I was a boy, I was taught that all eels were born in the sea. Do you think these eels were born in the mountains?"

Jimmy thought for some time, and then answered.

"Me see piccaninny eel come mountains, big eel no come."

"But," I said, "an eel coming from the sea to the mountains would have to climb up high rocks at waterfalls."

"Me see piccaninny eel, 'undreds climb up rock."

"Then you think they come here when young, and go away when big?"

"Yes, me see 'em."

"Can an eel travel on land?" I asked.

"Yes, 'im go quick, find water."

CHAPTER VII.

The Tiger Cat

Shortly after noon that day, while we were walking along a rough track about two hundred yards from the river, Jimmy stopped, and pointing to some very dense scrub in the flat below, about one hundred yards away, said, "Kangaroo dead longa bush, 'im tail gone."

"Do you know when it was killed?" I enquired jokingly.

"Yes, 'im dead one day (yesterday)," came the reply instantly.

"Well," I said, "one of my duties as Ranger is to protect the kangaroos, and we may as well see it." When we got to the place indicated by Jimmy, the dead kangaroo was there with the tail missing.

"I wonder who shot it. I don't suppose you know that?"

"Yes, big man, 'im longa boy."

"Seeing you know all this, perhaps you can tell me the name of the man who did the shooting," I replied with a laugh.

"'im Jack Blamey."

I was becoming mystified so said :

"Why do you think it was he?"

"Jack Blamey like catchem fish."

"What has fish got to do with it?"

Jimmy then explained. It seemed that while we were walking along the track he had noticed the footprints of a man and boy. The man's footprint was extra large, and also clearly defined, proving that he was a big and heavy man. When opposite the thick scrub where the dead kangaroo was, Jimmy noticed that the man and boy had left the track. When a little further on, they came back to it, he could see and smell kangaroo blood. He had guessed that the blood came from the tail, as it is the best part of the kangaroo. The man would not want to carry any more than this to their camp, three miles away, and over rough country. When I asked how he knew where they were camping, Jimmy explained that he had noticed smoke rising from the camping ground at Black-fish hole, about three miles away. He knew big Jack Blamey was very fond of fishing, also that he was a good shot. The kangaroo had been shot in the right place on the thigh. Jimmy had seen Blamey and his twelve year old son coming from the mountains more than once.

"Why did you say a kangaroo should be shot through the thigh?"

"Kangaroo no run away," he replied.

"Well, Jimmy," I said, "Circumstantial evidence is sometimes at fault, but I believe in this case you are right, and one of these days I will have a few questions to ask Mr. Jack Blamey."

When we left the river, and got further into the

mountains, the travelling seemed a little less difficult. The thick bamboo patches were missing, and the undergrowth was less dense.

That evening Jimmy concluded that a kangaroo was needed for the larder, and as necessity knows no law, he quickly secured one in the following manner: On seeing some kangaroos feeding on a clear patch of ground, about three hundred yards away, he cut down a small sapling about nine feet long. Then he tied the eagle's wings to one end of it, and carefully approached with it to within about seventy yards of the kangaroos. Silently he propped the sapling with the wings out-stretched at the top, up against a stunted bush. Withdrawing a short distance, and keeping under cover, he gave the call of the wedge-tailed eagle. At once the kangaroos lifted their heads and saw what they thought was an enemy coming after their defenceless Joeys. As Jimmy expected, the kangaroos centred their attention on the wings, and he had no difficulty in approaching them silently from the rear, and spearing the nearest.

When we made camp that night, I expected a good night's rest, but the hard bed, lack of experience in sleeping out, and the mosquitoes spoilt my sleep.

As I look back to the sleepless nights spent in the heart of the mountains, I remember that my thoughts would return to Beryl Graham over and over again. It was amazingly strange to me that love had come, contrary to all reasoning, and when the conditions were completely against any reciprocation. I reasoned it out from every standpoint and always succeeded in proving its utter futility, and yet the yearning for the unattainable would not

diminish, but seemed ever to increase. The thought would come that Fate, in more ways than one, had been working over-time to turn an irresponsible youth into a very serious man.

As we continued on our way next morning it was a mystery to me why Jimmy never became confused, or doubtful as to the direction, especially when for hours he would not get a glimpse of the sun. I asked him how he was always so sure of finding his way.

"'orse no lose way, me no lose way," he explained.

"I know a horse finds its way by instinct, but surely you must read signs of some kind, when in a dark forest," I answered.

"Trees tell black-fella what way south," was Jimmy's reply.

"As for me," I complained, "I am about as helpless at finding my way in a forest as a baby, so can't you tell me some of the signs?"

Jimmy then explained that if one is lost in the forest he should keep moving until the trees become less dense. Then examine their trunks near the ground, and it will be found that moss grows, as a rule, only on the south side.

"How would you find north and south on the plains where there are no trees, if the sun were obscured by clouds?" I queried.

Jimmy explained that on the plains he would look for scrub, wild flowers and plants, and birds' nests, or for running water, as the streams south of the Grampians run, as a rule, south to the sea.

"I can understand," I said, "how the flowers

would help you to find north, seeing they lean and turn to the sun, but what have birds' nests to do with finding north and south?"

The reply was, that on the plains the worst weather comes from the south west. This causes bushes and scrub to lean away from this quarter, also the growth on the south west side is, as a rule, weak and blighted. Most birds will choose for their nests that part of the bush where the growth is most dense, especially when it is lying away from the strong winds and bad weather, so on the wind-swept plains, the nests are usually on the north east side.

As we made our way over the rough mountain country, I was often surprised that Jimmy, though bare-footed, did not turn aside for thorns or sharp rocks. The hardness of the soles of his feet was almost incredible. One thing that impressed me greatly was that under all conditions, Jimmy walked silently. No doubt it was this attainment, combined with his wonderful mimicry, that helped to make him the expert hunter that he was. I noticed he walked more upon the ball of his foot than a white man does. On crossing a sandy patch I would sometimes see a slight impression of his foot, but the mark of the heel was seldom clearly defined, except when he was walking uphill. Although slightly built, he could walk for hours carrying a fair load, without showing any evidence of tiring. I was frequently puzzled as to how he knew, when still a considerable distance away, that animals or emus were in the vicinity. The first sign I would get that he was approaching game was that he would

reduce his pace, as a warning to me to walk as silently as I could. When walking against the wind he always knew of the presence of animals before he saw them. I never knew whether he could smell the emu before he heard its throaty calls "Plomb!" "Plomb!" but I was quite satisfied he knew of the emu's presence before he saw it.

The average white man, walking through the forest, would see very little game, and would probably get the impression that it was remarkably scarce. This would have been my experience had Jimmy not been with me. On several occasions he pointed out very young emus, knowing I would fail to see them on account of their protective colouration. It used to puzzle me how he knew exactly where to look for them. No doubt his sense of hearing had enabled him to pick out, when still hundreds of yards away, their peculiar shrill whistling cry in sharp contrast to the deep note of the old bird. On account of the distance away I would probably hear nothing unusual. I soon discovered for myself that the pad of the emu shows three toes in front and a round mark behind.

Jimmy was walking silently about fifteen yards in front, when a small animal of a type I had never seen before, evidently disturbed by my footsteps, bounded across the track between the blackboy and me. I called to Jimmy,

"Look quickly!" but though he turned promptly he was too late to get a glimpse of it as it bounded into the scrub. As I had stopped, Jimmy came back. As soon as he saw the faint print of the animal's foot he said, "Tiger Cat," and then added, "'im old one."

"I think you are wrong," I said confidently, "if you mean a native cat, as I have seen one before.

"'im no native cat, 'im tiger cat." was the reply. My disappointment must have shown on my face when I said,

"I did not get a good look at it, so if you see another be sure and let me know."

"Tiger cat no plenty, me find 'im."

While we had been talking, the young tracker had been gazing intently at the imprint of the animal's foot, and then he started off in the direction the cat had taken. He had no difficulty in following the trail, until he had covered perhaps seventy yards, when the track crossed a ridge of stone. The surface of the stone, through exposure to the sun and weather, was as hard as flint. Jimmy's skill was now put to the test, but he never faltered. With his eyes glued to the stone he moved at a snail's pace. A white man would have seen nothing whatever to guide him in his search. To the young tracker the faintest scratch of a toenail, or displacement of a tiny leaf or fragment of stone, told him what he wanted to know. As soon as the ridge of stone was passed Jimmy increased his pace, but looking ahead I noticed more stone very similar to the last ridge. I was surprised when he came to it, that he did not reduce his pace, but walked as if the track was over sand. I knew by his attitude that he was still following the trail, and I was mystified by the ease with which he kept to it over hard rock. After another forty or fifty yards had been passed, Jimmy held up his hand for me to stop. Stepping with great care to a small bush, tomahawk in hand, he spotted the cat,

and threw the tomahawk. His throw had been a true one. When I hurried up to the cat it was quivering in what I thought were its death struggles, so I said,

"You are deadly with that tomahawk, for the one hit has killed it."

Jimmy grinned, and said :

"'im no dead, 'im sick fella."

As I gazed on the tiger cat, the quivering stopped, and it opened its eyes as if from a sleep. When it saw me a few feet away, it rose from its recumbent position, displayed its cruel looking fangs, and assumed a defiant attitude. Its fierce looking whiskers and bristling spotted tail, about two feet long, differentiates it from the native cat, and it is easy to understand why it has been given its name. It is bigger than a native cat, and has white spots all over its body, which is dark brown in colour. A slight tinge of blue intermingling with the brown and white is also noticeable. After making a show of fight it suddenly turned and dashed away to safety.

"Why did you say it was an old cat?" I asked.

"Old one scratch (long toenail), piccaninny cat no scratch." Jimmy explained.

"How was it you had no difficulty in following the cat over the second ridge of stone?" I asked.

"You come, me show 'em." was the answer.

On retracing our steps to the stony ridge, Jimmy pointed to some almost invisible moss which a white man would probably fail to see, unless it was pointed out to him. This moss, though of a meagre and delicate growth, showed clearly to the tracker the footprints of the cat, although, as Jimmy pointed out, the su

was not in a good position for tracking. He preferred morning or evening for difficult tracking, as the sun, shining at an angle, exaggerates the length of the grass or moss, and therefore an imprint of a foot is more easily detected.

CHAPTER VIII

Camouflage

Although I was considered athletic I found the walking difficult, as my boots were too light and not suitable for the work of tramping over rough mountain country. I was limping from a slightly wrenched ankle received from stepping on a slippery tree root, and Jimmy, noticing this, pointed out that he could see water ahead, and that we would camp there.

Abnormal rains in the spring had caused water to lie in a hollow and, from a distance, it appeared as a permanent lake. Presently he noticed some circles on the surface of the water spreading out from the edge of the small lake, and knew that this disturbance was caused by wild fowls searching for food. On drawing closer his keen eyes detected a number of swans swimming on its smooth surface. At once he made preparations to secure a couple of the youngest, as the old ones are not suitable for eating, as their flesh is rank and tough. Using the trees and scrub as cover, Jimmy approached to within a short distance of the water. He now selected and

cut off portion of a small green bush which he needed to place his head in, when in the water. Then throwing off his clothes and carrying one of the eagle's wings, also his spear with a loop or snare attached to one end of it, he entered the water about sixty yards from the swans. As soon as he was correctly placed near some water weeds and rushes, he gave the call of a swan in distress. When the swans looked in the direction of the call, Jimmy, holding the large wing in his left hand, flapped it as a wounded swan would do. At once the swans swam straight for the flapping wing, as the blackboy expected them to do. Jimmy, with his right hand holding the spear with the loop attached to the end of it in position, waited for the swans' heads to come round some rushes close to where he was hiding in the small bush. Without any danger of being seen, he placed the snare over the selected swan's head, and dragged it to him. With a quick one-handed twist he dislocated the bird's long neck, and lifted the snare into position again in readiness for another victim. He repeated the operation successfully, and the big birds seemed quite unaware of the tragedy being enacted in their midst.

He told me afterwards that the blacks preferred this way of catching swans to any other, as it hardly ever fails. Should plovers be anywhere near the swans, the task is more difficult as they act as sentinels for the latter, and one warning call from the plover is enough to put the swans on their guard. The sentinel for the kangaroo is the jay, and the blacks try to avoid this bird when after the big animals. Perhaps the remarkable care he was compelled to

exercise in screening himself, not only from the game but also their sentinels, accounted for his wonderful ability as a hunter especially in the art of camouflage. Of all his cleverness I admired it the most.

On a summer evening when the shadows were lengthening, and the light deceptive, his skill was uncanny, especially when he was naked. He told me that he had often approached a flock of emus, when there was no cover except grass an inch or two in height.

When he saw my incredulous expression, he said that he would show me how he did it. He pointed to a small area of short grass where a fire had swept through some time previously, and told me he would hide in it, if I would look in the opposite direction for about two minutes. I turned from him, and when two minutes had passed, I looked around but could not see Jimmy, although he had assured me he would be in the grass area. I was becoming mystified, when I thought I detected a slight movement behind a small black stump with a broken limb, on the edge of the grass plot. I promptly called out that he was behind the small stump, when the broken limb, (Jimmy's arm) fell to the side of the stump, (his body). I was still wondering how it was I had not known the stump was Jimmy, when I noticed he had been standing in the shadow thrown by some dense tall trees. Also, as I looked beyond him, I noticed that the bare trunks of the trees, being in the shadow, appeared almost black. Jimmy had been quick to take advantage of both the shadow and the dark background the trees afforded. He had tricked me in the

same manner as he had the emus by discarding his clothes and appearing as a black stump.

Jimmy was now more careful than ever that no smoke arose from our camp fire, as he considered we were gradually approaching the hiding place of the outlaw. He arranged that we would have hot roast swan for breakfast, without the possibility of any smoke arising. He found some clay, and encased the half-grown swan, feathers and all, in it until it looked like a big clay football. Then it was ready for the morning.

As we were resting that evening, Jimmy pointed out that his favourite way of catching ducks when they are feeding in shallow water is the following. He would obtain a suitable bush to place his head in, and then entering the water at a selected spot, he would wade very slowly in the direction of the birds. When about ten yards from the nearest he would remain perfectly still, and wait for the ducks to approach him, in search of dainty morsels in the form of beetles, grubs, and other insects. As soon as a duck came close enough he would reach for its legs, and drag it quickly under the water and wring its neck. As the ducks look for their enemies above the water, he had often secured as many as six without the remaining ducks being aware that all was not well.

Being dog-tired I curled up gratefully for a good night's sleep, but the busy mosquitoes, and the strange noises, especially the thumps the kangaroos made on the hard ground with their tails, kept me awake, and for the third night I had very little sleep.

In the morning at the first call of the kookaburra, Jimmy placed the clay ball containing the swan in

the hot ashes. In less than two hours the now hardened clay cracked slightly, and was easily separated from the roasted swan. When the clay was lifted off, most of the feathers adhered to the clay, and the swan was ready for eating, so on this occasion we had the hot meal without any smoke arising from our camp.

Jimmy cheered me up when we started off that morning by pointing to a small mount a few miles away, where he considered Hall was in hiding with Ladybird. In reply to my query as to why he thought Hall would be there, his answer was that it had many advantages, the main one being that Ladybird, being bred on the plains, could climb a mount only with a good track to the top. This mount not only had the good track, but could be climbed from the one side only, as the other sides were rocky and steep near the top. This would suit Hall, as he would know from which side to expect trouble if his hiding place were discovered.

Jimmy told me he had been watching for smoke, and though not sure, thought he detected faint smoke ascending from this mount that morning. He also told me that Ladybird, though a grand hack for the plain country, was not suitable for the rough mountains, as her hoofs, like the hoofs of all horses bred on the plains, were shaped like inverted saucers. The mountain bred ponies' hoofs were shaped like inverted cups, and this enabled them to climb over mountains other horses would not attempt.

When we started tramping again, the pace was slow for my injured ankle was a big handicap, and I was just about exhausted when Jimmy called a halt,

as he considered we were as close as advisable to the mount he wished to 'try out.' We did not light a fire that evening, and apparently neither did anyone on the mount on which our eyes were fixed until darkness set in.

About midnight, just as I had fallen into a troubled sleep, I was awakened by frightfully loud and blood-curdling screams. Up to that moment I had hardly known what nerves were, but I could feel now the hair on my head beginning to rise.

"What was that, Jimmy?" I almost shouted in my sudden surprise.

For a space he seemed paralysed with fear, and was speechless. Then in a voice I hardly recognised he said,

"Big white spirit man."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

For some time he was incapable of making any coherent statement. To help put him at his ease, I remarked,

"I would like to hear the screaming once again as it might assist me to fathom the mystery of it."

When Jimmy's nerve returned, he told me, that when a child, he had heard his folk speak of a big white spirit man or ghost, that lived in the Grampians. A few of his tribe, including his father, had seen it but they had a great dread of seeing it the second time, believing that sudden death to those beholding it would be the result. According to Jimmy's statements, two peculiar features of the appearance of the mysterious apparition were, that it occurred in one part of the mountains only, and no sign of it had ever been noticed in daylight. According to what he

was told, it was very big, and of a dazzling whiteness. Jimmy knew the fear of it was the chief reason the blacks did not like camping in the mountains at night. They avoided that part of the Grampians in the winter time, as the days were too short to enter the mountains for any distance, and return to the camp at the foothills before darkness set in. His father had told him that every time the big white spirit had been seen, the moon had been shining brightly. We had not seen any ghost, but there was no doubt about the reality of the dreadful screams we had heard.

Sleep had left me, and I lay thinking of what I had just been told. As I needed sleep, I decided to try to get my mind off the unpleasant subject, when unexpectedly remembrance came to my aid, and I had solved the riddle to my complete satisfaction.

Some years before, I had been spending my Christmas holidays at our country home, when a big fire started in a neighbor's property. I had ridden a well-bred horse to the vicinity of the fire, and had tied it, in what I thought was a safe place, to a tree. After beating at the flames for some time, I suddenly thought of the horse, and on looking in its direction, noticed the flames burning fiercely in close proximity to where it was tied. Hurrying to the spot just in the nick of time, I noticed the flames were very close to the tree. The horse was terrified, and when it found the halter held it fast, had screamed loudly until I had cut the rope that held it. Being now satisfied that a horse was responsible for the screams, the next question was,

"Why had a horse in the mountains been terrified?"

After thinking it over, I remembered that a sensitive well-bred horse would go almost mad with fear should it see kangaroos hopping for the first time at night. I felt sure I had solved the mystery of the frightful screams, and knowing my little friend would be wide awake, I said,

"Those screams were made by Ladybird."

Jimmy at first was doubtful as to the correctness of my opinion, but as soon as I had convinced him of its truth he was satisfied, and immediately went to sleep again. But the longed-for sleep would not come to me though I needed it so badly. My injured ankle was aching, and I was beginning to feel ill for the first time in my life.

CHAPTER IX.

Descending the Cliff

When morning came Jimmy left camp to find out whether Hall was on the small mount. He knew there was only one path to the top, and that it narrowed at one point to a few feet where the track passed between cliffs. He quickly came to the pathway, and used the cover of scrub and undergrowth at the side of the track, wherever possible, until he came to this spot. Here he was compelled to use the narrow opening between the cliffs to reach the small plateau above.

Jimmy's eyes were continually peering ahead, for he knew, should he be seen by Hall, a charge of swan-shot or a bullet would be the outlaw's greeting. The necessity of looking ahead, instead of examining the ground at his feet, as he usually did, nearly cost him his life. Had he examined the ground he would have noticed fresh footprints pointing down the mount, and these would have put him on his guard. Also, across the track at the narrow opening was placed a long strand of wire grass. Anyone walking up the mount would be almost certain to drag the

strand uphill, or downhill if walking in the opposite direction. Even had the little tracker noticed the strand of grass which his foot dragged slightly uphill, he would probably not have attached any importance to it.

He safely passed between the cliffs, and was at once close to the plateau, when a pair of small birds, evidently objecting to his presence near their nest, gave several shrill warning calls. Knowing that anyone on the plateau would wonder what the birds were objecting to, caused Jimmy to hurriedly leave the vicinity, and then all was silent again. The small plateau on the top of the mount was about one hundred and fifty yards across, and was covered with stunted scrub and small gum trees. Jimmy commenced circling a likely looking spot, where he fancied Hall's camp would be. He was careful to use any cover available, to prevent anyone at the spot from seeing him, but little thought that the real danger would come from the path he had just used. Possibly the small birds which previously had annoyed Jimmy now saved his life, for they again gave the warning calls. At the first note he hastily looked in the direction of the calls, and was really scared by what he saw. A man, whom he knew must be the outlaw, was quickly advancing in his direction, and each caught sight of the other at the same moment.

Hall, who feared and hated all blacktrackers, at once raised his gun, but when he looked along the barrel the blackboy had mysteriously disappeared. The outlaw would probably not have seen Jimmy, had he not been on the alert, due to noticing the displacement of the wiregrass, and Jimmy would not

have looked in Hall's direction had it not been for the birds' warning calls. Now each had a tough problem.

Jimmy's was to leave the plateau, and Hall's to prevent him doing so. Hall, with his finger on the trigger of his deadly-looking gun, advanced slowly, never taking his eyes off the place where he had seen the blackboy.

Jimmy knew instinctively that to remain where he had been seen would be fatal. So, exerting all his amazing powers of using the scantiest cover to screen himself, he quickly gained the doubtful protection of a rather small tree trunk. Now his sense of hearing was to be put to the test, for he could not watch the outlaw in case he was seen by him. The little tracker could hear the slow steps of Hall coming in his direction, and a little to the left of the tree behind which he was hiding.

As the outlaw advanced to a position parallel to the tree, Jimmy, depending solely on his hearing, moved slowly around the tree. The tree trunk being small, the slightest error in judgment would have been fatal. The outlaw stopped when slightly past the tree, evidently puzzled by the complete disappearance of the blackboy.

Jimmy, desperately alert for the faintest sound, waited anxiously while Hall considered his next move. The outlaw apparently was quite satisfied the blackboy was not hiding behind the small tree, as he had inspected all sides of it in his advance to the spot where he now stood. After standing in the one place for some seconds, Hall evidently had thought

out his plan of action, for he now hurriedly turned to the path near the 'gateway.'

As soon as he considered it safe, Jimmy left the cover of the tree, and wriggled to a small bush, as he considered it safer to watch the outlaw from behind a leafy bush than from behind a bare and smooth tree trunk. When close to the narrow opening, or 'gateway' between the cliffs, which was the only way of escape for Jimmy, the outlaw stepped into the shade of a gum tree, and was prepared evidently to act as sentry indefinitely. Jimmy, noticing this, decided to stay where he was, even, if necessary, until darkness set in, and perhaps thirty minutes passed without any change of position by either of them.

Then an inspiration came to the tracker, that perhaps Hall expected a friend to visit him at his camp. Should the visitor prove to be Red Walton, the blackboy's chance of escape would be hopeless, as then one of the men would search the plateau while the other guarded the 'gateway.'

The next few minutes were anxious ones to Jimmy, for, judging by the outlaw's actions, the blackboy felt sure the former was expecting a friend. Jimmy believed there was no way of escape except through the 'gateway.' He knew the cliffs on the other sides were very abrupt, but he decided to investigate. He was successful in reaching the cliffs without being seen, but on looking over the edge he saw there was a sheer drop of about forty feet to a patch of earth and stunted bushes, and then another drop of about three hundred feet. He believed that if he could negotiate the first abrupt drop, he

could find a way to descend the second cliff, and make good his escape.

The little tracker knew his position might become desperate at any moment, so he decided to act without delay. He had often seen a large grey 'possum fall from a tree, a distance of more than forty feet without hurt to itself and, if so, surely he could fall a smaller distance safely. Taking from his pocket the strong cord he always carried in readiness for snaring animals, he tied one end to a small but tough bush growing on the edge of the cliff. Then, allowing the cord to hang down the cliff's face, he estimated the distance he would have to fall when he reached the end of the cord.

He decided to take the risk, and anyone looking across the valley from the opposite mount about half a mile away, would have seen something resembling a large spider carefully letting itself over the edge of the cliff, and slowly sliding down an invisible thread. After lowering itself in this fashion a short distance, the spider would appear to drop abruptly, and the spectator would imagine a fall of hundreds of feet to the forest below.

But the blackboy had correctly estimated his ability to withstand the shock of the fall to the first landing, and although he felt jarred and unsteady, he was really unhurt by the fall. Now he had to face the unknown where no man, white or black, had ever trodden, and his task was a prodigious one.

As Jimmy gazed longingly at the forest beneath him, he felt dizzy and then realized he must not look down, otherwise his nerve might weaken. He could not afford to make one mistake as that would mean

certain death. For a time he regretted his rashness in deciding to make the attempt of descending the forbidding-looking cliff. Then he visualized the awful predicament he would have found himself in, had he been held on the plateau until his greatest enemy, Red Walton, arrived on the scene. To avoid his enemies, it was necessary to risk his life, so with every faculty keyed to play its part he commenced the long and dangerous descent.

It was imperative that eyes, hands and feet should work in perfect harmony, otherwise he could not hope to succeed. With painstaking care he had descended about one-fourth of the distance, and was beginning to think the task was not quite so difficult as it appeared, when he came to a dead end, or a place where the cliff became abrupt. He not could discern any track which would lead him to the forest hundreds of feet below. For a space his nerve seemed to fail him, but as his life depended on his next move, he called on himself for a supreme effort, and calmly examined the features of the cliff near at hand.

The inspection failed to disclose any suitable path. While he was hesitating as to what he should do, his keen eyes detected a few faint marks on a small ledge on the side of the cliff's face almost level with his eyes. It was really not a path, but a ledge a few inches wide with a yawning precipice beneath it, but Jimmy had noticed something which was of more value to him at that moment than the richest gold mine. He believed that the marks on the ledge had been made by a rock wallaby and, if so, the ledge must connect with a pathway. Moving with the greatest care, for he knew what it meant should he fall, the

little tracker climbed the short distance to the ledge, and was then confronted with another problem. It was necessary for him to know whether to turn to the right or left, and he examined the almost invisible tracks left by the wallaby to see if he could learn anything from them. The slight impressions were so old that only a blacktracker would have noticed them, but on closer examination he believed the ledge had been used by the expert climber as it moved from right to left. He decided to move to the left, and after some perilous moments felt that his faith in the wallaby had been justified. Anxious to know whether the ledge did connect with a pathway, he glanced along its full length. Then he saw something, which under ordinary circumstances, he would have completely ignored. It was a goanna about three feet in length, basking in the sun a few feet from the end of the ledge, but it was between Jimmy and his objective.

As the blackboy drew close to the goanna it resented his approach, and opened its mouth in a threatening way. Jimmy's intention had been to ignore the usually harmless reptile, but it looked like causing trouble. He realized that it would be necessary for him to step carefully over it, but on drawing closer, and attempting to do so, the reptile prepared to make a snap at the blackboy's leg, and he was just in time to withdraw it. Jimmy had once seen a fight between a black snake and a large goanna, and on that occasion, much to his surprise, the goanna had killed the snake.

Having had experience of the attitude adopted by the goanna, when about to bite, undoubtedly

saved the blackboy from injury. The ledge being narrow, the big question for Jimmy was, how was he to safely pass the goanna? It was essential that he should hold fast to the cliff's face, otherwise he would probably fall and be dashed to death. Jimmy decided to hold on with one hand, and use the other to break off a piece of soft rock, and to throw it at the obstinate reptile. He threw the lump of rock but it had the effect of making the goanna more savage, and it now challenged him by facing him more directly.

The blackboy, handicapped as he was, became very serious as he could not think of a way of passing to safety. Eventually he decided to put his knowledge of the goanna's habit of refusing to let go, once it had bitten, to his advantage. On account of his precarious position it took him some time and effort to remove his jacket, and then holding it in one hand, he worked closer to the goanna.

When he came within range, he slashed the reptile with the jacket, and at once it made a quick grab and secured a good hold of the cloth. Then bracing his feet to withstand the effort, the little tracker lifted the coat sufficiently high to raise the goanna free of the ledge, and swung both out and dropped them into space.

Now Jimmy was guilty of a bad error in judgment, because he looked down at the wriggling form still holding tightly with its jaws to the fluttering jacket. Had he been more experienced he would have refrained from looking down at the wriggling and twisting reptile. The sight seemed to fascinate Jimmy, who knew the goanna would presently strike a large projecting rock, which appeared like a huge

knob on the cliff's face. Crash! and the reptile was cannoned out clear of the cliff. Down into the depths it quickly fell, still holding to the coat.

Then without a moment's warning, a great dizziness seized Jimmy, and he almost fell. Only one thing saved him from following in the wake of the reptile to a horrible death, and that was the firm way he had braced his feet when lifting the goanna from the ledge. As his brain cleared, he turned his eyes to the cliff's face, and very slowly made his way to the end of the ledge, and stepped from it to the comparative safety of a narrow downward path.

Slowly and carefully the little tracker continued his descent of the forbidding-looking cliff, but the tracks of the animals were much plainer now, and his confidence had returned.

As soon as the dangerous task was completed, and the foot of the cliff reached, he made for the spot where he considered his jacket would be found. As he expected, it was still tightly held in the jaws of the dead reptile. With a stick he forced the jaws apart, and recovered his jacket. It was unharmed except for a large patch of slime on the part of the cloth that had been in the goanna's mouth. Jimmy was not surprised at the slime as he had often seen goannas freely sliming birds and young rabbits before swallowing them whole.

Then after resting a little—for the mental strain of all his recent tension had made him very tired—Jimmy turned his face towards our camp. Like a homing bird he made straight for where he had left me, but on the way he crossed the fresh tracks of a horse several times. He recognised them at once as

Ladybird's and knew that the outlaw had removed the mare that morning from the plateau to another hiding place not very far away. He did not search for Ladybird but returned to camp to make his report.

I listened to his story in wonder and admiration. The vision of this dauntless blackboy, conquering the grim mountain precipice, came to me and thrilled me. I could see he was still feeling overwrought and strained, so I suggested we should wait to discuss our plans till we had partaken of some food.

After we had eaten and rested we began to talk. We realized the great risk of approaching the outlaw's stronghold now he was on guard.

All of a sudden, Jimmy, with more excitement than he usually showed, exclaimed,

"We get 'im today."

"Good for you Jimmy, if you mean Hall, but tell me how on earth are we going to do it?"

"Makem fire, 'ot day, smoke 'im out."

I readily agreed with Jimmy that the day was ideal for starting fires. Even the green scrub and bushes would burn on such a day as the heat was intense. A scorching wind was blowing from the north east, and the dense smoke from the burning green and sappy trees and scrub would be unbearable on top of the small mount where the outlaw was camped, if the wind held from the same quarter. We arranged that Jimmy should start the fires, and that I should intercept Hall as he changed camp to get away from the smoke and heat. Naturally the outlaw would go further into the mountains, seeing that he would realize the fires had been started by his enemies. It was of importance to know what track Hall would

be likely to take, and Jimmy had noticed only one track leading further into the mountains. According to him the track was a rough one and difficult to negotiate.

It was arranged that Jimmy would guide me to the track, and that I would take up a position where the outlaw would be placed at a disadvantage. As soon as I was in position, Jimmy would work his way round the mount until he was on the windward side, and then he would set the fires alight.

Everything worked out as we wished, and soon dense columns of smoke were curling up the sides of the mount where the outlaw was in hiding. As the thermometer would have registered over one hundred degrees in the shade that day, without the additional heat and smoke, I reasoned that the outlaw would waste no time in making for a new shelter and my judgment was quickly justified.

CHAPTER X.

The Fight for the Revolver

I was hiding behind a rock at the side of the track when I suddenly saw the outlaw carrying his belongings, coming towards me. He was easily recognizable from his photo, and he had the shifty restless eyes of a hunted man, as he hurriedly glanced in all directions. I noticed he did not have any fire-arms or weapon in his hand. As soon as he came close I sprang from cover, and almost before he was aware of my presence, I had the revolver against his ribs.

"Hands up!" I ordered.

Realizing he was cornered, he slowly raised his hands, and the bundle dropped to the ground.

"First of all, where's your gun?" I asked sternly.

"I don't carry guns," he growled, "What's yer game?"

"Your game is up; I want your gun quick and lively." Noticing he showed a tendency to drop his right hand, I ordered sharply,

"Keep that hand up or I'll drill a hole through you." Keeping the revolver close to his body I worked around to his right hand side. A bulging

pocket told the tale. As the most urgent matter at that time was to get possession of the gun, I put my hand in his pocket to take it. The outlaw divining my intention, forced his hip sideways, making it rather difficult, but after some struggling and twisting I succeeded in gaining possession. I felt some satisfaction in hearing the rattle of the gun on the stony ridge where I had tossed it. Momentarily, seeing he was disarmed, I permitted myself to be partly off my guard. In a flash he wheeled round striking blindly at the same time. Unluckily for me, not only did the hard blow on my face partly daze me, but caused me to drop the revolver. My boxing experience had taught me, when in a dazed or uncertain condition to get to close quarters, and I gripped the outlaw around the waist. Then, as my brain cleared, I realized with an intensity of horror the awful blunder I had made in allowing the revolver to drop from my hand. Think of it! At grips in a lonely mountain recess with a desperate and powerful man, and lying within a few feet of us a little weapon that would mean death to the vanquished! And I had, with egregious folly, provided the stake for which we were now madly striving. There was not time to think, but if instinctive feeling could be translated to thought or utterance, uppermost in my mind or on my tongue would have been the words,

"You sorry fool! You brainless idiot."

But even thought had to be restrained, as every spark of mental alertness was required for concentration on the terrific physical test that now presented itself. As I have said, I gripped his waist, but in a flash realized that this was no scientific wrestling match.

My throat, the most vulnerable part, was open to attack, and I was just in time to parry his quick move to that objective. At the end of the first wild clash we clung to each other's necks—he with his right arm around my neck, and I with the left around his. His grip was immovable and I hung on with all the tenacity that I possessed. Our free arms, my right and his left, engaged in a frantic duel for the opposing throat. Our bodies swayed from side to side. Our feet set widely apart moved but little, as the rocks gave a precarious foot-hold.

There was little change in tactics, each obviously realizing that a slackened grip might give the other an opportunity to slip away, and dash for the prize. Only a few short minutes passed, but it seemed like hours. I had a slight advantage in a free right arm, and more than once, I was able to get a strangle hold on his wind-pipe, but a fierce drag that would have torn my fingers from their sockets compelled me to relax.

And so we struggled on till we reached a deadlock. Locked together with perhaps "Death" the only spectator, we glared at each other with heaving breasts, and slowly weakening limbs. Although not an actual word was spoken, the struggle was noisy throughout. At times the terrific pressure exerted by one or the other would cause a shout of pain which would ring back from the mount across the small valley, above which was set our tragic stage. Groans and imprecatory mutterings were frequent enough. I might as well admit that I had secret hopes that some of these sounds might reach Jimmy.

I can't pretend to have anything but a vague idea as

to how long we stood thus grimly locked together, but I suppose it was anything from five to ten minutes. Then, suddenly, as if by mutual consent, the struggle opened out with greater intensity than before. We now fought as if we realized that this would be the end of all earthly things for one or the other. And, as it was inevitable, why delay? The tactics had been changed, and a deliberate throw was now the aim. Heaving, jerking, twisting, tripping, with grim endeavour, but still never slackening the steely grips for an instant, the deadly combat moved nearer and nearer to the dreadful climax. And through it all, the little shining atom of steel for which the greatest physical energies and passions of two strong men were at issue, lay harmlessly on the rocks near our feet.

Then I don't know how it happened, but, clinging fiercely together, we toppled over, and I was underneath. I remember nothing more as my head must have struck a rock. As I regained consciousness I heard someone speaking in a 'faraway' voice, and dreamily noticed that my head ached painfully. Everything seemed blurred, and I was in a state of bewilderment as to the meaning of it all. But gradually full consciousness returned, and with it the awful realization of the fact that I was helplessly lying on my back, gazing up into the barrel of my own revolver. The scowling face behind the weapon was distorted with rage, and devilry gleamed from the hard beady eyes.

"Well, yer blasted meddler, wot do yer think of yerself now?" the outlaw snarled, as he saw consciousness had returned to me.

While I could hear plainly the taunting words, my speech had not yet returned so I could only remain silent.

"Yer nigger must have let go yer 'and," he sneered, "But 'op up now, as I want to show yer round a bit." he ordered. It required a big effort on my part to regain my feet, and when I did so, the outlaw pointed to the narrow track leading further into the mountains.

Then I started on what proved to be a dreadful experience, as I was handicapped, not only by my aching and throbbing head, but my ankle had been further injured by my efforts when wrestling with Hall. The heat was intense, and the smoke was trying on my eyes. I noticed Hall's eyes were blood-shot from the effect of the smoke, and believed my eyes were in the same plight. I don't remember much of the walk, except that it seemed to be up hill, and that we passed some beetling precipices. I felt that I must give up, and was just about to defy the outlaw to do his worst, when I saw water beneath us a short distance away. It proved to be the small lake Jimmy and I had camped at previously.

When we reached the water, both drank deeply. After our thirsts were quenched, Hall ordered me to walk in the water on the edge of the lake, and not to leave a footprint if I valued my life. After walking in this manner for about three hundred yards, I was ordered to step on to a stony ridge, which led to a small cave, the opening of which was concealed by a large bush. The outlaw held the branches of the bush aside for me to enter, and then he followed. The cave was small and hardly worthy of the name, but it was quite big enough for the outlaw's purpose.

The first thing he did was to order me to lie down, which was exactly what I wished for. As soon as I had obeyed him, he tied my hands and feet securely, and left the cave, after warning me that if I attempted to escape, he would shoot me. I was now free to think over the probable object of the outlaw in making me his prisoner. On account of the weariness and pain from which I was suffering, my brain for sometime would not function properly, but gradually I began to see things in their right perspective.

Then my thoughts were turned into another painful channel, as I heard a revolver shot only a short distance away. Now my problem was, did the outlaw fire at Jimmy? If Jimmy had been shot, my position was dreadful in the extreme, for then my great desire would be to avenge my little friend. But if the outlaw had murdered him, as I believed he would should he get the chance, then probably he would spare my life, only on condition that I promised to leave him free to make his escape from the mountains. The outlaw might even go further than merely asking for my promise of negation, by demanding my help to assist him to escape, with the alternative of death, should I refuse. The thought was a terrible one, and I struggled to free my hands, but the outlaw had certainly made a good job of tying them. The effort caused my head to throb painfully, and I was quite content to remain quiet, but I continued trying to think out a plan of tricking Hall. At last an inspiration came, and I determined to put the plan into operation.

Darkness came, and presently I fancied I heard

something moving near me. Then in the black darkness of the cave, I felt a touch and heard a whisper,

"If yer make a noise of any kind, it will be the last yer ever make."

I did not show in any way that I had heard the threat, but evidently Hall believed I had, for from that moment, everything was almost as quiet as the grave. I had now food for thought, for the whisper meant that Hall was afraid of someone overhearing him, and the only one of whom I could think was Jimmy. I was satisfied that Hall had fired at the blackboy, and missed, and that the little tracker was close at hand. The thought that Jimmy was nearby helped to cheer me, but my position was still perilous.

CHAPTER XI.

A Close Call

When Jimmy had the fires burning to his satisfaction, he took up a position where he could keep the 'gateway' in view. He believed the outlaw would quickly decide to get away from the heat and smoke. Also, knowing his enemies had started the fires, he would be anxious to elude them. Jimmy had not long to wait, as he soon saw Hall with a swag on his back, hurrying from the camp.

As soon as he noticed Hall had started on the track leading further into the mountains, he was satisfied that all was going well. Now Jimmy's mission was to find Ladybird. He knew there was a possibility of the flames spreading and possibly reaching the mare, so it was necessary for him to find her. He had seen the hoof-marks bearing away from the mount that morning, and quickly he made for the place so as to pick up the trail. Reaching it without any difficulty, he followed the clearly defined trail for about twenty minutes, when his sense of smell together with his acute hearing told him that his searching had ended.

Ladybird knew Jimmy, and showed her pleasure in no uncertain way. But time was precious, so Jimmy quickly untying his favourite, jumped on her back, and made for a safer hiding place. On reaching a suitable place, he secured the mare, and then started out to find how his friend had fared in his efforts to arrest the outlaw. The little tracker's feelings can be imagined when he reached the place where the struggle for the revolver had taken place. He quickly read the tell-tale signs of the combat, and knew that the outlaw had been victorious.

Now Jimmy had a delicate and dangerous task, as Hall, knowing that the blackboy was somewhere in the vicinity, would be on the watch for him, and would shoot without warning. But the danger had to be faced, and Jimmy commenced to follow the trail left by the two men. He left the trail wherever it was convenient to do so, and sought cover afforded by the forest, but the travelling then became difficult and slow. The tracker had a good idea that Hall would make for water, and eventually he reached the spot where the men had entered the water. Now Jimmy was up against difficulty and danger, as he wished to examine the footprints at the water's edge, but to do so, it would be necessary to leave the protection of the forest. He fancied that perhaps this was a trap set by Hall for him, but possibly it was not, and he very much desired to know whether the two men had turned to the right or left.

After reasoning it out, he decided it would be too risky to advance into the open, and considered it would be safer to use the limb of a large leafy tree which reached out to the water's edge. The dense

leaves would act as a screen to hide his movements from the outlaw, should he be on the watch a short distance away.

With his back to the water, and his eyes peering into the forest, the tracker reached up to grasp the limb, but as he did so, something moved in the forest about twenty yards away. This was exactly what Jimmy had been watching for, and like lightning, he used his disappearance trick, as a shot rang out over the clear waters of the lake. Now the position was completely reversed, as Jimmy was the master of the situation, with absolute confidence in his ability to keep in touch with the outlaw, without being seen.

Hall had now to find out whether the blackboy had been hit, and for that purpose he approached the spot where he had seen Jimmy. One look told Hall he had failed, and that somewhere in the forest a pair of wonderfully keen eyes was watching his every movement. The outlaw, now most anxious to give Jimmy the slip, decided to wait until darkness set in, and then to move silently to the cave. Had he known the tracker better, he would have known he was really playing into Jimmy's hands, as the darkness would handicap the white man, not the black.

The forest shortly became very dark, and Hall, who had removed his boots, cleverly moved in the direction of the cave. His effort to move silently was a good one, but almost every step was heard by the little tracker, who was really very close to the outlaw, and moving as smoothly and silently as a cat. When Hall reached the mouth of the small cave, Jimmy saw exactly what happened as the outlaw

pushed the bush to one side and stepped into the hiding place. Then Jimmy's problem for the time being was solved when he heard a faint whisper inside the cave.

During the long hours of that unhappy night, germs of a score of plans and hopes floated through my brain. My best chance I thought lay in shamming semi-consciousness in the hope that the outlaw might relax his guard on me. When in the morning he found I was not interested in the food and water he offered me, although I was suffering intensely from thirst, he looked at me more intently, and I was careful to open only the eye that was paining as I knew it was bloodshot. I must have looked a very sick man, and no doubt Hall reasoned I was not in physical condition to be of much danger to him. At all events he decided to risk it, and unfastened the bonds from around my feet. He had already untied my hands before offering me food.

"Now look 'ere, yer blasted meddler," he demanded, "What the h— are yer and that black swine 'ounding me fer? I've 'arf a mind ter slug yer now and be done with yer. If yer 'ad been one of those flamin' coppers I'd 'ave finished yer off before this. Come on, what's yer blasted game?" he again demanded.

As I did not answer he gave me a vicious kick in the ribs to rouse me into action of some sort. I mumbled something in an apparently half dazed manner, although every faculty was keenly alert, and keyed if necessary to immediate action.

"Hold my horse till I get off." I muttered stupidly.

"Don't worry about yer 'orse, it's a pair of wings you'll be needin' soon, I'm thinkin'." and he laughed hoarsely. "But I'm askin' yer why the h— are yer trailin' me with a ——— nigger?"

After staring intently at me for several seconds, and not getting any reply, he spoke in a quieter way.

"Now see 'ere, I'm goin' ter be generous with yer. Yer don't look a bad sort of a feller. Take yer swine of a nigger, and get ter h— out of these mountains, and give me yer word that you'll both keep away from me, and I'll give yer a chance ter live. If yer don't I'll bash yer 'ead in with this gun, and leave yer 'ere ter rot." And he significantly tapped my revolver which he carried in his belt.

I knew I was in a desperate position after what I had undertaken to accomplish. I could not promise to forego my mission, and return meekly the way I had come, leaving the bushranger free to perhaps perpetrate further deeds of violence and outlawry. I could see that Hall was not bluffing. He was rapidly working himself into a fury, and I knew that my life was hanging in the balance. I was in a quandary, and decided to spar for further time, and see if he would perhaps relax his vigilance, and give me the opportunity which I was hoping for.

"My word, it's hot; we must be nearly there now; good man Jimmy!" and I started fumbling feebly with the neck of my shirt.

"Yes, yer nearly there all right," cried the outlaw. "I gave yer a chance ter live and yer were too big a fool ter take it, now. I'm goin' ter bust yer 'ead in, and all the blasted blackfellers in Australia won't save yer."

"'ands put up pretty quick." came in an excited voice from the cave entrance.

Hall turned swiftly to meet the unexpected menace, and seeing the blackboy, who held a tomahawk in readiness, his hand flew to his belt, but the instant Hall turned from me, I hurled myself at him. I caught his right arm fairly and jerked it fiercely upwards. His shoulder joint seemed to crackle with the force of the wrench, and the trigger finger evidently contracted, and a resounding shot drove the charge to the cavern roof, bringing down a cloud of dust. Then immediately afterwards I heard the revolver clank on the rocky floor. The force of my onslaught knocked him off his balance, and lunging at him with all my weight, I dashed him to the ground. I judged that his arm had been injured, but one-armed he fought, and desperation and unbridled fury gave him strength that, with every advantage, I could scarcely withstand.

Jimmy was like a crazed man, jumping around us excitedly shouting, "Me kill 'im, Boss, me kill 'im."

Perhaps it was the fear of Jimmy that caused Hall to cease struggling, and in sudden panic, he gasped:

"Keep your blasted nigger quiet, and I'll give in."
"Call 'im off quickly or 'e'll butcher us both." he hoarsely screamed.

"That's enough Jimmy," I ordered, "the fight is over. Get me those cords."

I now tied Hall's hands behind his back with the same cords that he had such a little time before unfastened from my hands. Although submitting without any further struggle, Hall was far from silent, and gave vent to his rage in a stream of invective

against all blasted niggers and my companion in particular, that greatly amused Jimmy.

Seeing all danger from the outlaw was over, Jimmy and I had breakfast, consisting of some cold stale meat. The outlaw had partaken of his meal already. Now the question was, what were we to do with Hall. Finally it was arranged that I would be left in charge of him while Jimmy left for assistance. He would ride Ladybird to "Murrumbar," and Mr. Graham would no doubt arrange for a number of helpers to leave for the mountains without delay. The heat was still very trying, as the wind was again coming from a northerly direction, and smoke from the fires seemed to be everywhere.

I noticed when the time came for Jimmy to start on his long journey that he looked hard at me, and was loath to depart, and I learnt subsequently that I looked ill and exhausted. I found out later that everything went right with Jimmy and Ladybird. The time of his arrival at the homestead was about 7.30 p.m. and immediately Mr. Graham became busy. A messenger carried news of the capture to Gumvale with a request for help. Without loss of time Mr. Graham started for Gumvale. When he left the village for the mountains he was accompanied by five mounted men under Jimmy's guidance.

CHAPTER XII.

The Mountain Ghost

Since I had been left with the outlaw there was nothing to do but watch and wait, and I found this a trying experience, as my head was aching and at times throbbing painfully, and the heat and smoke were almost unbearable. I suggested to the outlaw that we shift our position to the top of a ridge only a short distance away, and the move proved to be a good one, as the heat was not so intense. I reasoned it out that help could not arrive before early the following morning, and I dreaded the night coming, as I was not in a fit condition to guard a desperado when the darkness came.

When darkness did eventually set in, Nature began to assert itself, and my eyelids began to droop. An overmastering desire to sleep took possession of me. The outlaw seemed to be asleep, but this, I knew, was only to put me off my guard, and no doubt his brain was working at full pressure, planning a means of escape. I had warned him that should he make any attempt to escape, I would shoot him,

and I felt secure if only I could manage to remain awake until help came.

The moon fortunately was rising, and to me it was never more welcome, though at first it appeared through the smoke as a huge ball of blood.

I had been sitting on a log, facing the outlaw, but several times I almost fell asleep, so decided that my only chance of keeping awake was to stand up. This I also found difficult, as my injured foot at once protested, but it was better to bear the pain than to fall asleep, so I continued standing. Presently the sky blackened, and I knew a thunder storm was brewing, and before long the rain came down in torrents. It seemed as if a thunder cloud had burst, and probably this actually happened when the clouds came in contact with the mountain peaks. After the heavy downfall the sky cleared suddenly, and the moon appeared shining brightly in a clear patch of sky. I was facing the outlaw when something in the distance caught my eye. For some moments I was almost terrified by what I saw.

About five hundred yards away, a large white ghostly figure appeared to be looking in our direction. It was of dazzling whiteness, and as I looked at it I could see a slight movement, and strange to say, this fact impressed me more than anything else. To my distorted imagination it appeared to be moving slowly towards us. Imagine the situation in which I was placed. The hardships I had suffered had weakened me for the time, both bodily and mentally, and as my clothes were wet through, I was shivering with the cold. Then to crown my misfortunes I found myself at midnight in the company of a murderer

and a ghost in the heart of a lonely mountain forest many miles from the nearest habitation.

At once I thought of Jimmy's big white spirit man, and realized that this must be the mountain ghost. I gazed for some seconds at the glistening white giant, before the thought came to me that the ghost was a creation of my over-wrought imagination. Apparently the strain of the last few days was affecting my brain, and I was becoming unbalanced and hysterical. I looked at Hall and knew by his attitude he had not seen anything unusual, so I said to him, "Look!" and pointed to where I had been gazing. Hall calmly looked in the direction I had indicated, and in the light of the full moon I saw him tremble and almost collapse. His head dropped, and in a hoarse whisper as if speaking to himself, he gasped :

"Death."

Being a murderer with a guilty conscience, and under arrest, the supernatural sight had completely unnerved him. I looked again in the direction where the ghostly apparition had appeared, but heavy clouds had obscured the moon and the wind was commencing to blow, and presently it had increased to almost a gale. Impatiently I waited for the sky to clear, but the clouds were dense, though no more rain fell. Then after about an hour, suddenly the moon appeared again, but the ghost of the mountains was not visible. Although somewhat disappointed at the absence of the ghostly apparition, my nerves were now on edge, and I began to suffer from all kinds of strange and unpleasant fancies. Grotesque forms which in the daylight added novelty to the mountain scenes now seemed like queer ghoulish

figures, leering out from rocky caverns to peer into the night.

I was reminded of all the stories of ghosts and spooks to which I had often listened when a boy. I remember almost jumping with fright as a 'possum nearby gave a snarling coughing cry.

The night dragged wearily on, but I had no chance of relaxing. I knew Hall was awake, but never for a moment was I off my guard, and I gave him no opportunity of escaping. As daylight approached, the outlaw roused himself, asked for his pipe, and then sat moodily sucking at it.

Then to my surprise he broke the silence by remarking as though to himself:

"A man can't live forever. I've 'ad a good spin, anyway."

"What made you start on this game." I asked.

He looked at me as if I had made an intrusion into his meditations, and after a pause replied:

"I don't exactly know what yer mean."

"Well, you had to start somewhere and sometime you know."

"I don't know nuthin' of the sort. It's like this, me old man got dished up for somethin' or other, and 'ad a spell in quod. Later on 'e 'ad a swag of kids, and sometimes to keep us from starvin' 'ad to pick up anything that came 'is way. Orfen enough 'e was lagged, and as I was the oldest I 'ad to get out and get some tucker somehow. The —— coppers kept an eye on our lot, and wouldn't leave me alone even when I was only a kid. I soon found I was safer in the bush, and there was always a lot of cattle in the gullies, which mostly didn't belong

ter no one. I used ter pick up a few, and sell them ter get some cash, and that is 'ow it all started."

I expected him to continue, but nothing more was said, and shortly after daylight, Mr. Graham, Jimmy and four men arrived, and my long vigil had ended. Then a peculiar incident happened, as ignoring completely the other members of the party I looked at Jimmy, and said :

"When the big white spirit man was seen had there been heavy rain?"

Jimmy's reply came quickly :

"Yes, father 'im say plenty rain quick."

The other members of the party had noticed my lack of greeting to them, and had heard the unusual question I shot at Jimmy. I have no doubt, taking into consideration the change in my appearance, they thought the hardships I had been through had weakened my brain.

Mr. Graham now suggested that I should try to sleep while the men made a rough stretcher for Hall, as he refused to walk to where the horses had been left in charge of a man. Although I needed sleep my brain refused to relax, and after about an hour's delay, we started for Gumvale.

The first part of the return journey was extremely rough and trying, even with Jimmy's expert guidance, but the mountains need to be seen for one to understand the difficulties. At last we got to the horses, and although my mind is partly a blank as to the journey, I remember having to be helped on to the horse. It was the intention of the party to reach Gumvale before dark, if possible, and by taking only short spells it seemed that this would be accomplished.

I remember one thing that struck me as peculiar, and it was that frequently I found first one and then another of the company looking at me as if I were a freak, or something quite unusual. I did not know the reason until next day, and then the whole matter was quite clear to me.

Just about an hour before dark the tents and galvanised roofs of Gumvale came into view, and soon we could see a small crowd of people waiting in the only street the village possessed. I had been listless and was feeling ill, but I remember losing my listlessness temporarily as I recognised, on the fringe of the waiting crowd, the winsome and animated face of Miss Graham.

She looked intently at each of the party in turn, and our eyes met. Instead of the smile of recognition with which I expected she would greet me, she looked at me with the indifference one would expect a young and cultured lady to give to a complete stranger. I cannot find words to tell of the disappointment, and feeling of pain, that surged through me at the treatment I had received from the one whose good opinion I valued above all others, and from whom I considered I deserved gratitude and thanks. I realized that I had not been a success on the mission just accomplished, and was quite prepared to give Jimmy all the credit of the capture, but I had done my best, and a man cannot do better than that.

We had now reached the hotel, but as I felt utterly incapable of making any effort to dismount, I was lifted from the horse, and assisted into a bedroom. Without waiting to undress, I fell on the bed completely exhausted.

I must have fainted for the first and only time in my life, for the next thing I remember was somebody trying to force a little brandy into my mouth.

The smell and taste of the spirit being pressed to my lips must have revived me a little, for I drank the contents of the glass, then turning to the wall as if to dismiss those in the room, I fell into the sleep of complete exhaustion.

It was about 9 a.m. next day when I awoke, and for a space, could not remember what had happened or where I was. Memory gradually came back to me, and once again the pain of Miss Graham's lack of greeting was the uppermost thought in my mind. Up to the present I had not been troubled by any regret regarding my worldly position. But what a keen sense of disappointment swept over me as I realised that the ordinance of social caste had placed an insurmountable obstacle to my approach in the direction of a great desire.

A gentle tap at the door disturbed my dismal thoughts and I was asked whether I would like some breakfast brought to me. In a mechanical way without any interest, I answered, "Yes," and then as I looked around the room I noticed a mirror. Some unaccountable impulse had caused me to centre my attention on it. Almost falling from the bed, I staggered to the mirror, only to be astounded by the apparition I beheld in the glass. Instead of the usual reflection of a young and spruce clerk, the mirror showed an objectionable looking tramp with old and torn clothes, a remarkably dirty and unshaven face, and worst of all, two very bloodshot eyes. The

reflection was a repulsive one, and for several seconds I looked in the glass completely mystified.

Suddenly realization burst upon me. It was my own face upon which I was gazing. I will never forget my utter astonishment at the discovery, and one who never had a similar experience, could not imagine my feelings. When breakfast was brought in, I asked if I could have a bath before I attempted to eat, and I was assisted to a warm one. The difference it made to my spirits was remarkable, but still the wound received from Miss Graham remained.

After breakfast I was still too weak to leave the bed, and my injured head was aching, so I lay quietly, thinking of my unusual experiences. Then suddenly, I solved the riddle of Miss Graham's action, and the reason of her seeming indifference now became apparent to me. If I had failed to recognise myself in the mirror, how much more likely it was that she would fail to do so. This explanation acted as a tonic, and I quickly began to recover.

CHAPTER XIII.

Escape of Outlaw

I did not leave my room that day, but on the following day I was able to do so. I walked to the front door, where the landlord met me, and expressed sympathy on account of the hardships I had suffered. I thanked him and remarked :

"It was no picnic, but I am pleased the outlaw is now in custody."

"What ! haven't you heard the news ?" he exclaimed.

"What news ?"

"Why, Hall escaped last night," he dejectedly replied.

"Escaped ! Impossible !" I said.

"Impossible or not, it's true," replied the landlord.

I then learnt that when the outlaw had been brought to Gumvale, Mr. Graham, J.P., in the absence of the police, had arranged that the hand-cuffed prisoner be placed in charge of three trustworthy men, and confined in a strongly built shed at the back of the hotel. They were confident of their ability to hold the outlaw safely until the troopers arrived to relieve

them. The three men were in charge the first night, and until about 4 o'clock the following day, when a trooper arrived from Stawell, and accepted the responsibility of holding the prisoner.

The trooper was armed, and was quite satisfied he could safeguard Hall until the police van arrived with two policemen, sometime before dark that evening. The trooper was surprised as darkness approached, that there was still no sign of the police van appearing. He had seen the preparations being made for its departure from Stawell, and considered that at any minute it would arrive.

He had been engaged now for some hours in the monotonous duty of tramping backwards and forwards before the temporary lockup. Not unnaturally, his mind had become switched on to matters entirely unconnected with the security of his prisoner. For one thing, he had been without a square meal since early morning, and he was picturing to himself the mighty feed that he would be capable of accommodating when he was relieved. As he was thus dreaming in the uncertain light, three men quietly approached from the direction of the bush. One of them, almost a giant in appearance, crept up to the back of the shed, and listening for the opportunity, darted along the side and leapt on the back of a very much astonished trooper. For a time the trooper did not clearly realize the probable object of his attacker, and was concerned only with his own safety. As soon as full realization came to him he drew his revolver, but his arms were pinioned and he was unable to use it. Then both men fell to the ground, with the trooper underneath. As soon as the

revolver struck the hard ground it was discharged by the shock, and a sharp report broke the stillness of the night. This was just what the three men wished to avoid, as the noise would bring men to the spot to learn the meaning of the shot. There was now no time to be lost, so the big man called to his mates :

"Never mind the rope. No time now. I can manage 'im. Wrench the lock off quick."

The two men rushed to the door of the shed and quickly wrenched the lock off with an iron bar. As the door swung open and the handcuffed bush-ranger hurried out, several men came into the yard and called :

"What's up?"

At once the big man released his hold on the trooper, and jumping up he followed the other desperadoes who had run around the shed.

As soon as the trooper found himself free he jumped up and followed his attacker. The big man heard the trooper following him, so decided to stop him. As the unfortunate policeman appeared round the corner of the shed, he was met by a brutal blow on the face which sent him staggering backwards. Then the big man rushed to join his mates, who had already reached the dark scrub and safety.

At about 10 p.m. that evening the police van arrived, and the delay was then explained. It seemed that when the van had travelled about seven miles from Stawell, one wheel had collapsed through the iron tyre loosening and coming off, owing to the wood work of the wheel having shrunk. This, coupled with the roughness of the bush road, had caused the unfortunate accident. By the time one of

the policemen had ridden back to Stawell and secured the services of a wheel-wright to replace the broken wheel, several precious hours had been lost. When the troopers arrived at their destination the delay had been fatal.

On learning the particulars of Hall's escape, the troopers promptly took action to secure the services of blacktrackers, as they knew Jimmy would not co-operate with the police. They realized that at least two days must elapse before trackers could reach Gumvale, and in the meantime nothing could be done.

Later on that morning I was feeling weary and listless, a reaction from the excitement of the previous few days, and felt a slight sense of irritation when the landlady came to my room, and informed me that Mr. Graham was outside and wished to speak to me. I fully expected that he simply desired to question me with reference to the capture of Hall. However, after a somewhat formal greeting on my part, he said :

"The ladies would like to see you at Murrumbar, if you feel like coming out."

I must admit that the kindly and unexpected invitation acted as a stimulant, and I lost little time in accepting and preparing for the drive out to the station.

I was rather shocked by the change in Mr. Graham's appearance. He seemed to have aged by years since I last saw him. The once happy-looking face was lined with sorrow, and the cheery manner of old had given place to a strangely distraught attitude.

I found conversation difficult, and was relieved when we reached the homestead. There was nothing

lacking in the greeting which I received from Mrs. Graham and her daughter, but it was quite evident that I had come to a home where grief had been taking its toll.

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Graham, as she clasped my hand, "we had feared that there might be a double tragedy in this."

"And," broke in her daughter, "I should have felt that I was to blame. Yet," she continued, "how can I feel that the foul murderer of our dear friend should be left free to cause sorrow in some other homes. Why, oh why, is the world so cruel in so many ways?"

I am but a poor hand at speech when sympathetic references are necessary, and felt a little ill at ease, but in a tone that sounded hesitating and clumsy, I replied:

"You need not have felt worried on my account. With Jimmy to guide and assist me through the greater risks I was in little danger."

"But," replied Miss Graham smiling, "Jimmy has been most vehement in his assurances that the capture was entirely due to your varied capabilities."

"Good little Jimmy, I am afraid that he has been indulging a little in his characteristic hobby of hero worship," I rejoined.

"I would suggest that he has a double in that respect," was her reply, "But please let us have your version."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Miss Graham, all the credit of the capture of the outlaw was due to Jimmy. In fact, he was wonderful. I cannot find words to tell you how much I admire his clever-

ness and unselfishness. If humility is a virtue, then my experiences with Jimmy in the mountains have given me at least this one virtue. Also it is only right you should know that the one task I had set myself, that of arresting Hall, I bungled. I have now told you the truth, and it will pain me in the future to be referred to as if I were a hero, when Jimmy is entitled to all the credit."

"Bravely spoken," said the elder lady, "but I suppose that we shall have to look for the truth midway in the two very positive, but rather contradictory, statements."

Mrs. Graham then excused herself, and again I found myself alone with the charming girl of my seemingly hopeless dreams.

"Isn't our Jimmy splendid?" she said with emphasis, and I felt a shade of envy. "Do you know that while you were away, you both had a place in my prayers, and I felt a strange confidence that with such a guide as Jimmy you would return safe and sound. And over and over again I felt rebellious over the handicap of sex that prevented me from joining with you in your danger."

"Have you ever been in the mountains, Miss Graham?" I asked by way of changing the subject.

"No, no, no," she replied, shaking her head with a slight touch of dejection. "And how often have I gazed at those forbidding grey walls, longing to reach through to the scenes beyond. Poor Mr Stevens sometimes spoke of them, but he was so wrapped up in his actual work here that I could get very little information from him. Perhaps," she

added, laying her hand on my arm, "I can learn something now."

"Do you mean that you would like something of a description of the scenic grandeur of the mountains?"

"Exactly," she replied. "It is strange that while I have lived practically my whole life here, I know very little of what lies just a few miles away."

"I'm afraid that what I have to say might sound like a lecturette on the subject."

"Never fear. I shall be too inquisitive to permit you to become tiresome."

CHAPTER XIV.

Death of Missionary

Thus it came about that I told her of the great precipitous mountain-side masses, set tier on tier in such order that they might have been so placed by the hands of mighty giants in the ages long past and gone. Castellated, turretted, terraced and balconied, with strange ghoulish and grotesque forms projecting from their grim faces, as though on guard. Of majestic monoliths of such gigantic proportions that their attitudes seemed to be those of stately contempt for the huge eucalyptus, which reared skyward from the deep gullies that broke around the rocky bases of crags and peaks. Quaint shapes were there, carved by the erosive agencies of wind and storm. Imagination was not necessarily exaggerated in suggesting the forms of animals, birds and beings in these less pretentious rocky masses.

Immense caves worn by the rush of waters along the rocky foundations, or gaping chasms, clefts, caverns and gorges, gashed in the mighty cliffs by the forces of subsidence or upheaval, and precipices, sheer, vast and awe inspiring. Gazing down to the

abyssmal hidden depths, one felt the puny status of mere humanity.

And throughout this vast turmoil of jumbled rocks and rushing cascades; restful banks and terraces edged the mountain feet, garlanded and decorated by flowers, sweet and beautiful, in prodigal profusion, changing varieties marking the different heights.

My fair listener sat with her chin resting on her hands, her face lit up with evident interest. She kept me plied with queries, pertinent and intelligent, and I was given little respite.

"I did not know the place contained a botanic paradise. Did you identify any of the varieties?"

"Some of them, yes." And continuing I made a crude attempt to describe the beauties of the myrtles, the blue tinsel lily, boronia, fairy wax flowers, fuchsia and sarsaparilla. She knew that the Grampians was the home of the unique and dainty thryptomene and rare orchids, and had seen some of the magnificent heath with its beautiful shades of rose, pale pink and white.

"And birds?" she questioned.

"You spoke of a botanic paradise. It would not be a daring prophecy to declare that the day is coming when these mountains will be a haunt of both naturalists and botanists."

"And to think that all this has remained practically a closed door to me. You make me feel that I shall do something desperate, and break through the bonds that keep me from sharing in these things that you have described."

"Actually, there should be no great obstacle to that end." I suggested.

"Do you really think it possible?" she asked, her face a little flushed by excitement.

"Quite; though of course you would require a guide."

"But where could I obtain the service of such a one?"

"I can answer for one who would be most happy to undertake the commission." I replied with the brightest smile I could conjure up.

She understood and clapping her hands, cried:

"Oh! would you?"

"Would I?" I repeated, "My cup of joy would be full if I could again inspect the glories of the Grampians, and this time in your company."

She blushed slightly as she replied:

"I shall look forward to it with the expectation of at least equalling that joy."

We were silent for a while, and then I said:

"Do you know Jimmy is a Christian?"

"Yes, and his life seems to be in keeping with his profession."

"Did you know his friend, the missionary?"

"Yes, but not as well as I would have liked, as he seemed to give the poor and friendless the preference. He was a humble follower of his Master, and it was splendid the way he devoted himself to the cause of Christianity, and of service to others."

"What caused his death?" I asked.

"It was in saving others that his own death was brought about, but perhaps you have heard about it from Jimmy?"

"No, but I shall be grateful if you will tell me

of it." She was thoughtful for a short space, and then replied :

"Well, Mr. Grant was the Home Missionary for a big district, including the foothills of the mountains. As the land adjacent to the mountains is of little value, and hardly worth the clearing, there were scarcely any roads, or even fences to act as land-marks. A guide was necessary, and Jimmy was invaluable in this capacity. One very hot day, while Mr. Grant and Jimmy were driving along a mountain track in a small buggy, they noticed a fierce fire raging in the vicinity of a poor widow's home. The widow had two daughters, aged about twelve and ten years respectively, and the family obtained a livelihood principally from honey derived from about fifty beehives. As the flames were bearing in the direction of the cottage, Mr. Grant lost no time in hurrying to the assistance of the woman and her children. On arrival at the cottage, he realized that the position was desperate. The flames were travelling at a fast rate, and the cottage, surrounded by trees and scrub, was doomed. Without hesitation, he hurried the woman and children into the buggy, and ordered Jimmy to drive for safety without a moment's delay, adding that he would look after himself. Jimmy, knowing no time should be lost, drove off in the now over-crowded buggy. After he had gone a short distance, he asked the woman if she could drive. On learning she could manage the horse, Jimmy told her to drive straight for the open country. He then left the buggy and hurried back to assist Mr. Grant. On reaching his friend, who seemed confused, Jimmy called out, 'Run quick, me show way.'"

"But Mr. Grant could not run quickly, and Jimmy was forced to go at half pace, while the flames were advancing faster than ever. The position had become desperate, when Jimmy smelt water. The awful heat, combined with the unusual exertion was exhausting Mr. Grant. He found difficulty in following Jimmy over the rough and pathless forest country. When he noticed his coat had caught alight from a spark, he called to Jimmy: Leave me and save yourself.

"Jimmy would not leave his beloved friend, but assisted him as best he could to reach the water. It proved to be a small dam containing muddy water. Into this, Jimmy dragged the now almost unconscious man, and held his head above water until the fire swept by. As soon as Jimmy considered it safe, he assisted Mr. Grant from the water and hurried away for assistance.

"Jimmy's good work did not avail much, for, when Mr. Grant seemed to be making a good recovery in the hospital to which he had been taken, his heart refused to respond. Gradually it dawned on the aged missionary that his days were few on earth. A longing came over him to see Jimmy, so he wrote to my father asking if he could arrange it, and father took Jimmy to the hospital. The meeting between the missionary and the blackboy was a touching one, but when Jimmy knew that his beloved friend was dying, he was filled with grief. Nothing pleased him better than sitting at the bedside of the patient while the man of God spoke of the place to which he was fast hurrying.

"The sight in the hospital ward was an unusual one. Amid the white beds and white-gowned nurses, the

blackboy would sit at the bedside of the sick man, apparently unconscious of everything, but that he was to lose the one who was everything to him.

"One afternoon as the shadows were lengthening, Jimmy had been surprised at the stillness of his friend, when the eyes of the patient opened, and he at once looked for Jimmy. A pleased expression lit up the dying man's face as he saw Jimmy in his accustomed place. In a low and faltering voice he said to him :

"Our Saviour said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions ; I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also,' and Jimmy, I am going to the Better Land, but I will watch and wait for you. I know you will not fail me, and that we will meet again, where there is no sorrow or parting.

"Jimmy's tears were now falling, and even the nurses, accustomed to such scenes, were deeply moved. The last words of the dying man were : God bless you, Jimmy, and I pray He will bring you safely through. Goodbye.

"Shortly afterwards a good and noble man passed to his reward. After the funeral, when his will was read, it was found he had no relatives, and that he had left his property to be divided equally between Home Missions and Jimmy. As soon as Jimmy knew he was left sixty pounds, he sought advice from my father, and asked him to spend the money on a tombstone, and, as he was determined on this, his desire was carried out. Jimmy asked that on the headstone might be written lines he had often heard the missionary use.

"'God is love. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

CHAPTER XV.

Red Walton Unmasks

On returning to Gumvale two days later, I learnt that the day before two blacktrackers had arrived. Accompanied by three troopers they had picked up the tracks made by the four men who had kept together, and made for the mountains. The trackers had not the least difficulty in following the tracks. For several miles they walked at a brisk pace, never hesitating for a moment, as the trail to them was as plain as if the hunted men had tried to make it so. This was actually what they had done. When about four miles over rough and thickly-timbered country had been negotiated without difficulty, the trackers came to a small river which was, in the summer time, only a chain of small water-holes. It was here, at the edge of a small and deep pool, that the tracks ended abruptly. Although the trackers searched diligently for hours, and kept widening the circle from the spot where the tracks stopped, not a trace of any further footprints did they succeed in finding. The blacktrackers at last admitted they were beaten, and the search was abandoned.

It was afterwards discovered that the wanted men had purposely made a very plain track, knowing well that blacktrackers, accompanied by police, would be employed to follow them. When the river was reached, the bushmen decided that the trackers must be put off the scent, and they were completely successful by employing the following method. The four men reasoned that probably three troopers and two trackers would follow them, and they determined to use this knowledge to their advantage. When they got to the river, they slowly and very carefully walked backwards on their previous trail. They persevered in this for about a quarter of a mile, leaving as far as possible, no impression where they had previously made deep ones.

Then the troopers and trackers had carelessly walked over the trail, obliterating the slight impression made by the men when they retraced their steps.

As most aborigines find difficulty in counting any number over six, the hunted men considered they were quite safe, even should extra footprints be discernable. Then to make doubly sure, the men had separated, leaving the trail one at a time, and had made full use of fallen trees and stony ground. The trackers were also greatly handicapped by the fact that heavy rain had partly obliterated the tracks.

The police, though baffled in one direction, now turned their attention to finding who had assisted Hall to escape. Their first objective was to find the big and heavy man, so they had a list prepared of the big men who lived on the fringe of the mountains. After enquiries, they reduced the list to three, of which Red Walton was one, but he succeeded in

proving his alibi, as he swore he had been in the company of two men and a woman, playing cards that evening. He gave their names, and when the three were questioned by the police, they swore Walton was in their company all that evening. As one of the two men had a twisted foot, and was partly a cripple, the troopers knew he was not one of the wanted men. As nothing definite came of the enquiry, as to whom the big man was, the police were recalled, and the search for the outlaw and his accomplices was abandoned for the time being.

I had resumed duty after the few days spent at "Murrumbar," and, though I had lost considerable weight, I was gradually getting back to form. One of the duties of my office was to collect royalty on all posts and timber taken from the Government reserves near the mountains. The timber cutters would apply for a permit, and it was my duty to see that they carried out their part of the contract, especially the payment of the royalties to me as representative of the Lands Office. In due course I arrived at the camp of Red Walton, to obtain his figures of the posts he had split, and to collect the royalty money. He greeted me civilly, and answered all questions to my satisfaction. After receiving the money due from him, I had turned to resume my journey. Remembering I needed further information, I turned round suddenly, when I caught a look of intense hatred directed at me. In fact he looked like a criminal who would stop at nothing, and an uncomfortable feeling took possession of me. The expression on his face had been only for a fraction of a

second, but it had been long enough for me to see how I stood with Red Walton and his friends.

From that date I always carried a revolver, whether on duty or not. Whenever I got the opportunity I had revolver practice, but my shooting was disappointing.

As I considered it of importance, I wrote to a friend in Melbourne, who was credited with being a champion revolver shot, asking his advice. One statement in his reply was, that he kept both eyes open when taking aim. As he had proved his ability, I thought I could not do better than follow his lead. The more I practised with both eyes open, the more I was satisfied there was something wrong, as my shooting was remarkably bad. Then I commenced experimenting, and found that my left eye was the dominant or stronger eye. Had I shot from the left shoulder I could have kept both eyes open, but being righthanded, I found it necessary to keep the left eye closed, and aim with the aid of the weaker one.

A few days after my experience with Walton, I received a letter with a cheque enclosed from the police department, and the letter read as follows:

Dear Sir,

Under same cover we are forwarding cheque, value £500, the amount of the reward offered for the capture of Hall, the bushranger.

We take this opportunity of congratulating you on the fine work performed by you and the blackboy Jimmy. We leave to your sense of justice the remuneration to which you consider your assistant is entitled, as we only recognize you in the matter. The fact that Hall escaped after you

handed him over to our officer, does not weaken your right to the full reward.

The cheque came as a surprise, as, though I had known a reward was offered, it had not influenced me in my decision to attempt the capture of the outlaw. It was necessary that I should see Jimmy, and settle the matter of the reward, so I rode out to "Murrumbar" where Mr. Graham, Jimmy and I held a conference to decide how the money was to be divided. On Jimmy being asked what he thought his share should be, he replied:

"Me no want money, Mr. Wilson 'im get it."

Eventually it was decided that each of the five men who assisted in bringing Hall from the mountains would receive ten pounds each, and the balance would be divided between Jimmy and me. Although I had just received over two hundred pounds, I remember riding back from the homestead that evening in low spirits, and all because I had not seen Miss Graham, as she was away visiting friends. I tried to convince myself that she was nothing to me, but love is deep rooted, and I had an unhappy ride.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sheep Stealing

It must have been a fortnight later, when I received a letter from Mr. Graham stating that he would like to see me, when convenient.

Just as the candle draws the moth, I was drawn to "Murrumbar."

On arrival, Mr. Graham greeted me cordially, and told me the reason for his letter.

"About a week ago," said Mr. Graham, "I was driving with Jimmy over the western end of the station, about six miles from the homestead, when he asked me to stop the horse. He had noticed the tracks of sheep evidently being driven towards the western boundary fence, also the tracks of two horses, as if the sheep had been driven by two horsemen. We knew that the station hands had not been on that part of the property for some time, so our curiosity was aroused. Jimmy asked if he would follow the tracks. I had an appointment to keep that afternoon, but I find that if Jimmy recommends anything, his judgment is usually sound, so I told him to carry on. He followed the tracks for about

half a mile, but as the ground was very hard, I could not see anything unusual. When he came to the western boundary fence he found that the wires had been cut, and the sheep driven out on to a bush track. The severed wires had been joined, and tightened again, as if by expert fencers.

"I was now intensely interested, as I realised it was a case of sheep stealing, and that I was the victim. During a long experience in owning sheep, this was my first misfortune of the kind, or so I thought. Jimmy asked if he would continue to follow the tracks. I asked how many sheep he thought were stolen, and he replied: 'Me show 'em,' and when we approached a flock, he separated the sheep and pointed to about two hundred and fifty.

"Well, Jimmy," I replied, "As it does not look like rain tonight, the tracks will be equally plain to you in the morning. You can leave the homestead as early as you like, and have a full day's tracking if necessary, but keep the whole matter secret until I give you permission to speak.

"On the following day, Jimmy discovered that the sheep were taken right into the mountains, and as there were no return tracks, he is satisfied that the sheep are still there. Also he learnt, on examining the impressions left by the horses on the bush track, that one was a heavy and strong hack with a big and broad chest. This was proved by the width showing between the imprints of its front shoes, the distance apart being much above the average, and Jimmy is satisfied that the heavy hack was Walton's. The other was a pony without shoes, and Jimmy,

knowing Walton and Carew are very friendly, at once thought of Carew's pony. He remembered that Carew one morning had ridden the pony to his fencing work on "Murrumbar." On examining the hoof marks left on that occasion he is certain that one thief rode Carew's pony, as the marks made by one hoof showed that about an inch of it had been chipped away. This corresponded with the impressions left on the bush track. Jimmy believes, and I agree with him, that Carew, whom we have known for years, would not lend himself to sheep stealing, but had lent the pony to a friend of Walton, perhaps Hall.

"One feature of the robbery is that the thieves will have no idea that their well-planned theft has been discovered. The sheep were probably taken by moonlight, without anyone being within miles of the thieves, and as the ground is hard, only a black-tracker would have noticed the tracks."

"What you have told me, Mr. Graham," I said, "is very interesting besides being most important, and I will be only too pleased to help you if I can be of any assistance."

"I have not quite finished yet," continued Mr. Graham. "Jimmy's discovery set me thinking, and something that my late manager regarded as a mystery is also likely to be cleared up. After our last shearing, when correct tallies are kept, Mr. Stevens found that we were two hundred and twenty ewes short, and although he made every effort to unravel the mystery of their disappearance, he failed to do so. I have now come to the conclusion, that these sheep also were stolen, and from the same part of the station. The breeding ewes are given the best flats

to graze on in the summer time, and these flats are near the western boundary."

It was then arranged that Mr. Graham, Jimmy, and I, would talk the matter over later on, and see what action could be taken to recover the sheep. When we met that evening, Mr. Graham said that he was wondering if Hall had been in any way connected with the robbery. If so, it was evident he had not been mixed up with the previous one as he was then in the north-eastern district of Victoria. This was clear from the newspaper reports, and also from the police records. I then told Mr. Graham that Jimmy had noticed Ladybird and Red Walton's hack being ridden into the mountains on our first night there, but that he could not recognize the riders in the uncertain light, seeing that he was a considerable distance away. Mr. Graham said:

"Are you sure of the horses, Jimmy?"

"Yes, Walton hack big (roached) back, longa Ladybird."

"It appears to me," said Mr. Graham, "that undoubtedly Walton and Hall are friends, and that the big man who assisted at the rescue of Hall was Walton. I believe they are grazing the sheep on a good but almost inaccessible flat between the mountains. If I were a few years younger I would certainly sift the matter to the bottom. I forgot to mention," he continued, "that both lots of ewes taken were comebacks, in lamb, so the thieves will also get the lambs. Merino sheep would suffer greatly from foot-rot if grazed on undrained flats, therefore comebacks would do better in the mountains."

Jimmy said very little, and seemed extra quiet even for him, so to test him I said :

"Had I showed to better advantage on our last venture, I would ask Jimmy to accompany me once again, but on that occasion I was practically a failure."

Jimmy's reply came promptly :

"Me go longa Mr. Wilson, no go police."

Jimmy's words were pleasing to me, as I valued Mr. Graham's good opinion. I decided 'to cross the Rubicon,' and said :

"Well, it is settled. Jimmy and I will leave as soon as arrangements can be made, perhaps tomorrow night. Then we can get well into the mountains before daylight, as we do not want to be seen, and the venture must be a secret one."

Mr. Graham then got pencil and paper, and drew the design of the ear marks showing on the stolen sheep, as the brands on the wool of the first lot would be missing as soon as the sheep had been shorn. He pointed out that the ear marks would probably be altered by the thieves. If so, the easiest and best way to alter them would be to make certain cuts, which he drew on the paper.

That evening the two ladies were taken into our confidence, and told of the coming expedition, but I noticed they did not seem at all pleased. I was rather surprised, so when I got the opportunity, said to Miss Graham :

"You have lost the confidence in me you once had."

"You should not say that, and you are quite wrong," she replied.

"Well, I could not help noticing your lack of enthusiasm when you were told of our decision."

"Do you think it pleases me that you and Jimmy should be going into great danger? Besides, you told me it was for my sake you went the last time, and it nearly cost you your life."

"Miss Graham," I said, "I consider it a great privilege to be of service to you and your parents, so please don't throw cold water on our proposed trip, but regard it as a sort of holiday in the mountains."

The young lady was silent for a space, and then said:

"I am trying to remember words I learnt at College, commencing, 'Learning to love anyone is like an increase of property, it increases care, and brings many new fears,'" she hesitated, and I added, "lest precious things should come to harm."

"That is the correct finish to the quotation," Miss Graham said, "and that is exactly how I feel about your 'holiday,' and it would please me if you will cancel the arrangements, and let the old sheep go."

"Surely, Miss Graham, the thought of Jimmy and me going into danger does not make you unhappy, for we are simply doing a duty that must be done, and we would be cowards should we decline the risk."

"Perhaps I am slightly unstrung, for lately I associate you in my mind with Mr. Stevens, and he lost his life trying to do me a service," she said feelingly.

"Well," I blurted out, "I ask nothing better than to risk my life in your service, and whatever the result is, I will never regret it, so with your permission we will talk of more cheerful subjects."

Miss Graham smiled and said :

"What would you like to talk about?"

"Well, seeing I am due for further camping in the mountains, I would like to know what you have heard of the big white spirit man of the blacks."

"Oh! That reminds me," she replied, "that you saw the ghost when guarding Hall. Well, perhaps I can tell you something that will help you in solving the mystery. You already know that the blacks are convinced that a big white spirit inhabits a certain part of the Grampians. At first the early settlers in this district regarded the whole matter as a joke. They became more serious when a station hand looking for strayed sheep on the mountains was lost, and afterwards told his experience. This man roamed the mountain forests for five days, and when at last he reached the open country, his mind seemed strangely affected. He insisted that he had seen a large ghost, though strange to say, he had not heard of the big white spirit man of the blacks. He did not throw any light on the question, but hurriedly left the district.

"After some years had passed, an eccentric but well educated foreigner, who had travelled a great deal, came to this district. He built a camp near the mountains, and when one of his strange moods came, he would enter the mountain forests, and wander in an aimless way for perhaps a week, before hunger would force him to return to his camp. When returning from one of his sojournings in the mountains, he met my father who, noticing his half-starved appearance, invited him to come to our home and have some food. The offer was accepted, and during a talk with father he surprised him by saying that he

had seen something resembling a large ghost while in the mountains. My father immediately became very interested, and asked him if he had any idea what it really was. He replied that he had heard of a similiar apparition in a mountain in Germany, not very far from his birthplace. After being a dreaded mystery for many years, it was eventually believed to be caused by the moon shining on a light-coloured cliff after very heavy rain had fallen. As the water quickly disappeared, the 'ghost' was visible for perhaps a few seconds only. In reply to my father's remark that nearly all the cliffs in the mountains were of granite, and that he did not know of any perfectly white granite, the German remarked:

" 'The stained and yellow-looking sails of a distant ship are not white, but in the sunlight they appear as white as snow.' "

When my companion ceased talking, I was trying to recall whether I had been looking towards cliffs at the time the ghost had been visible. I must have looked over serious, for immediately she changed the subject, and was soon relating incidents of her college days, and I was perfectly content to listen to her cultured voice and look at her pleasing and animated face. My only regret was that the time passed too quickly.

The following day was a busy one for me, and I was fully occupied almost up to the time of departure. Jimmy and I were leaving the homestead at midnight, so at 11 p.m., just before I changed my clothes for the old ones, I decided to say goodbye to Mrs. and Miss Graham. Mrs. Graham was exceedingly kind, and her manner was like that of a mother, but Miss

Graham walked to the door with me, and I offered my hand in farewell. I have never been quite clear as to how it actually happened, but, as our eyes met, we seemed to draw closer to one another, and before I realized what was happening our lips had met. Then I found myself alone in the darkness outside.

At midnight, Mr. Graham drove Jimmy and me to the western boundary of the estate. Leaving the buggy, we were launched on an adventure which proved quite thrilling enough to satisfy us, especially Jimmy. On our previous trip I was inexperienced, but this time I had a good idea what to expect. I determined to save myself, where possible, as one needs to be in good heart when the strain comes, as I felt it would do before long. I had brought a small pillow for my head, hoping it would assist me to sleep, also a mosquito net, together with other necessary articles for the mountains. Our principal food was about a dozen pounds of flour.

We had about four hours of walking in the dark ahead of us, and as we walked along I said to Jimmy :

"I heard several men lately, referring to you by the name of 'Scotland Yard.' How did you get this name?"

"Mr. Rowan, 'im farmer, 'im call me 'Scotland Yard'." And then he told me the story.

One morning Mr. Grant and Jimmy were driving past a small farm, when the owner, named Rowan, hailed them, and said that his house had been broken into the previous afternoon, while he was away fencing, and that perhaps the blackboy could detect the foot-prints of the thief. Jimmy agreed to assist him, and asked for a list of the stolen goods. Rowan

replied that he did not see how a list would assist the young tracker, but Mr. Grant pointed out that a tracker could not know too much about the job he was to undertake, and that full information about the stolen goods would need to be given. Rowan then found pencil and paper, and commenced writing the list. While the list was being prepared, Jimmy remembered having heard that a trapper's hut was being built near the "Wattles Spring" in the mountains, about five miles away. The thought came to him as he learnt the nature of the stolen goods that they would be suitable for a rough camp, as nothing of much value had been taken. When the list was completed, Jimmy said to the farmer:

"Thief takem rabbit traps?"

"Yes," Rowan replied, "I forgot to mention that he took six from a box containing eighteen."

"Me find 'em."

"But what difference do the traps make? You surely cannot scent them?"

"Thief no take all traps longa 'im, no horse, 'im walk, me find 'im."

Jimmy, believing that the thief had no conveyance, looked for footprints. He had a good idea before commencing his search in which direction they would be found. He knew the best way to reach "Wattles Spring" was around Devil's Marble, a large round rock near high cliffs, and if his calculations were correct, his task was an easy one. It took him only a few minutes to pick up the trail, and sure enough, it led straight for the Devil's Marble, about four miles away. As the thief was carrying weight, his footprints were clearly defined, and Jimmy had no

difficulty in tracing them. After tracking the thief for about two miles, Jimmy examined a log alongside the track, and said :

"'im eatem dinner."

"I suppose you don't know what he had for dinner?" sarcastically asked Rowan, not expecting the reply to come instantly.

"'im eatem rabbit, bread, 'oney."

"How do you know all that?" asked Rowan.

Stooping, Jimmy picked up a small rabbit bone, and then looking into a tiny crack in the surface of the log, he picked out a small crumb of bread, which he put to his nose, saying as he did so :

"Wild 'oney."

Jimmy was helped on this occasion by the fact that honey found in the bush has a much stronger smell than garden honey, also he had noticed ants searching for crumbs. When the track had been followed about another mile over rising ground, Jimmy noticed that the thief was tiring. His strides were shortening, and then, all at once, they lengthened and became less distinct. Jimmy knew something had happened and stopped to consider. Then it flashed upon him that the thief had got rid of his burden. Jimmy stepped off the narrow pathway on which he had been walking, and, searching in the vicinity, he found a sack containg all the missing goods hidden under a bush. The owner of the stolen property seemed amazed at what he had done, and always after that referred to him as "Scotland Yard."

CHAPTER XVII

Jimmy's Bushcraft

When the sun rose, we were well into the cover of the mountains, and then decided to have breakfast, which consisted of sandwiches brought from the homestead. Jimmy was just the same quiet, capable, unselfish mate, and he always impressed me as being an ideal partner on such an expedition. He told me that just before daylight he had almost trodden on a brown snake. Being bare footed it had made him a little nervous. I was curious to know how he knew in the darkness that it was a brown snake, and his answer to my question was :

"Brown snake long, no fat, black snake fat, no long."

"Is the brown snake as dangerous as a black or tiger snake?" I asked.

"Tiger snake 'im kill, brown snake no kill, makem sick fella."

"Do you eat snakes?" I asked.

"Me eat snake, same you eatem eel."

I was surprised at Jimmy's knowledge of snakes, and I learnt from him that the blacks consider the

tiger snake the most deadly one of all. Occasionally, when badly wounded, it will bite itself, and this is the reason the blacks prefer to kill the snakes they use for food. The right way to kill a snake if intended for food, is to approach it quietly and cut off its head before it moves. People have been bitten, and have died, by foolishly picking up the severed heads. Jimmy did not know why a tiger snake is so called, but the reason, of course, is its colour, which is a golden brown with a black band. Jimmy considered the tiger snake a born fighter, and very deadly, and for this reason it is feared most. The stripes on the tiger snake are indistinct for some time before it sheds its skin, and then it resembles a copper-head. According to Jimmy, a four foot snake can swallow a three foot one, but only if swallowed head first. The eaten snake will digest slowly, a little at a time, commencing at the end first swallowed. Jimmy told me the reason why there are not many snakes in the mountains is because the jackasses (kookaburras) are plentiful there. The kookaburra can eat only small snakes because it has to swallow them whole. It picks a live snake from the ground with its beak, then flies on to a dead limb and bangs the snake against the limb many times to kill it. If there is not a tree nearby, it drops the snake from a great height, picks it up again, and then bangs it on the ground. Although the kookaburra does not kill and eat big snakes, the swamp hawk, and occasionally the wedge-tailed eagle, will attack large snakes, because the hawk and the eagle do not have to swallow them whole, but tear them into pieces. Jimmy had often seen the swamp hawk

carrying in its claws to its nest a fairly big snake for food for its young ones.

Resuming our journey, we walked as before, Jimmy being about ten yards in advance, and apparently not bothering about sheep tracks, but I knew he had not the least difficulty in keeping to the trail of the stolen sheep.

Just before noon Jimmy said :

"You likem eel, dinner time?"

I found on this occasion that we could not pick them out with our hands. We left the track and made for a water hole not far from it. I noticed the water was brown and muddy looking, and knew that Jimmy could not see well enough to use his spear on the eels, and wondered how he would secure them. His method was simple enough, for he walked into the dam, and felt about in the mud with his bare feet until he knew an eel was beneath his foot. Then, knowing exactly where the eel had buried itself in the mud, he drove his spear into its body. The head of the spear being arrow-pointed, held tight. When having dinner, Jimmy told me that when the water was too deep to wade into, he had often used what white men call a 'bob.' This is made by threading worms, which have been banged hard on the ground to stop them from wriggling and twisting, on a length of strong thread, say about six feet long. Then the worm covered thread is made into a bunch, and tied securely to the fishing line. When the eel bites, and pressure comes on the line, it is easy to pull the eel out of the water, as the rough mouth of the eel holds firmly to the bob.

When we started on our journey again after the midday meal, I noticed we were coming to a gap in the mountains, and understood then how the sheep were taken into the heart of the mountains. Our risk was that of being seen by the thieves, or their friends, and Jimmy seemed ever on the alert. He allowed me to catch up to him whenever he saw anything unusual, and the wild goats on the almost inaccessible mountain tops were interesting and novel sights to me. Once when he stopped and I drew near, he pointed to some moving objects on a scrubby looking hill, and said:

"Farmer lose 'em sheep, wool long."

"How do you account for the sheep being in the mountains?"

Jimmy explained that when the sheep owners find they are short of feed, owing to drouthy weather, they turn some of their sheep loose into the mountains instead of letting them die on their farms. There they eat edible leaves, plants, suitable scrub, and any rough grass they can find. As there are no fences, the sheep scatter, and it is impossible for the owners to find the original number, so there are usually lost sheep somewhere in the mountains. But, there are many drawbacks in the form of foxes, eagle-hawks, and worst of all, the crows, and the sheep do not thrive. The crows are the worst enemies of the lost sheep, because the latter do not get shorn, and the longer the wool, the greater the risk of the sheep 'getting down.' When they cannot rise, the crows, ever on the watch for this, pick out their eyes.

As the weather was very hot, I found that water for drinking was a serious question in the mountains.

At first I could not understand how Jimmy could always find it without difficulty, and gradually I began to learn from him. The shrill musical call of a mudlark would tell him that mud and water were not far away. Again, he would see birds hopping on the ground in the distance, and he would watch and see if they were digging for worms. In the summer the birds find the worms in damp ground, and Jimmy would watch for a spring when he noticed this occurring. In hot weather animals drink more, and their tracks often told him of the close proximity of water. Once looking ahead at a distant hill he noticed a thin strip of green, with brown on either side, although I could see nothing unusual on account of its distance away. Turning to me and then pointing to the hill, he said:

"Spring longa there; get water."

Emus seemed to be fairly plentiful, and I was surprised at Jimmy's knowledge of their habits. He regarded the big bird as a very foolish one, but in reality it was not foolishness so much as curiosity or inquisitiveness that made it an easy victim for him. He told me that, when he had time to spare, his favorite method of securing an emu was to carefully approach to within a hundred yards of a small flock, and then place a plume or piece of rag on a small bush so that the emus would see it. Being remarkably inquisitive, the emus must satisfy themselves as to what the unusual object is. Provided the big birds have seen or heard nothing to tell them that a blackfellow is in the immediate vicinity, they will approach quite close to the bush. An emu can then be singled out by the hunter and speared

from close range. This method, though usually sure, is sometimes a slow one, and as we did not wish to waste time, Jimmy said he would try to secure one by another way.

We were approaching a patch of grass tree, dotted here and there with clumps of small trees and bushes. Jimmy had heard an emu's call coming from it, so he stripped off his clothes until he appeared in his original copper colored suit, which, I thought, suited him well. His next move was to secure the crown of a spreading grass tree, which he placed over his head, cleverly disguising himself. Carrying his spear, he started off in the direction whither he had heard the call. Approaching with care, he saw several emus about two hundred yards away. He dropped his spear and picked it up with his toes, then he moved slowly in the direction of the big birds, dragging the spear along the ground. As soon as one of them lifted its head he remained stationary until it had finished its sentinel duty. After several stops, he found himself sufficiently close to use his spear, which he raised with his toes to his hand, and it was sent on its mission. At a short distance he seldom missed his mark, and when several emus ran off, one was left wounded, which he quickly killed. Jimmy was pleased with the big bird, as it was the season of the year when the emu is at its best for food. As Jimmy put it, " 'im in grease," meaning that the emu was fat. I asked him if he had other ways of tricking the emu, and he told me that the safest way when food is urgently needed, is to wear a dead emu's skin with the feathers on, as a disguise for the hunter.

This method seldom fails, as a blackfellow can get quite close before the emus recognize the deception.

Later on that afternoon the blackboy's keen eyes detected the small round tell-tale marks made by an emu's toes. He quickly found the nest containing sixteen eggs, and when I expressed surprise at the large number of eggs, he told me he had found up to twenty eggs in a nest.

"Are these eggs fresh?" I asked.

He at once replied.

"Yes."

"Why are you so sure?"

"Bad egg 'ot, good egg 'im cold." grinned Jimmy.

Seeing he had not touched them, I concluded his sense of smell told him the eggs were not in a heated nest. We took only one for food, as an emu's egg is equal in bulk to about ten hen eggs. That evening, before making camp, as Jimmy was crossing a small water course, he picked up three flat stones. Each was about the size of a poached egg and he put them in the pocket of his jacket: he did not volunteer any reason for doing so, but later that evening I learnt why he had gathered the stones. We were in no great hurry to reach our destination, and as we had started walking before two o'clock that morning, I said that we would camp at the first favourable spot, even though the light would be good for several hours. Jimmy at once commenced looking for his favorite acacia wood, and while engaged in this task, noticed the track of a wombat and said to me.

"Me find wombat 'fore dark."

He then gathered enough wood to keep the tiny fire going all night, for when camping out, even in warm weather, the blacks seem more contented if they have a small camp fire. After tea Jimmy started off with his spear, and had been gone about an hour when he returned carrying an animal resembling a small pig. He had seen the wombat lying near its burrow, and had speared it. He told me that his people valued wombat meat, especially the hind quarters, and the meat on its back. As a rule the clumsy looking wombat sleeps in its deep burrow in the daytime, and comes out at night to eat roots or grass. In hot weather it often comes to the surface and lies close to its burrow in case it is molested. I learnt from Jimmy that the blacks, when they find its deep and long burrow, send a small child down feet first. As soon as the child feels the wombat with its foot, it strikes the earth above its head, and calls out as loudly as possible. As the burrow may be ten or even fifteen feet deep, the blacks take every care that they dig in the right spot. They have their ears placed on the ground waiting for the child's signal, and usually are not far out in their calculations when they dig. Jimmy's frail looking spear had been broken when the wombat had risen and had fallen on its side, so it had to be repaired. I asked him why he did not use a boomerang, and his reply was :

"'im no good, longa trees."

What he meant was that the spear went straight, but in a forest a boomerang in its circling, would be sure to hit a tree. I soon learnt why Jimmy had brought the pebbles, for he placed them in the midst of the fire, and said :

"No fire mornin', boil billy 'em stone."

After the evening meal which consisted of emu egg and doughboys, Jimmy produced his beloved Testament, and asked me to read aloud.

While I was reading the foxes had been barking, or calling to their mates, so when I stopped he said:

"Me lose you, bark likem fox."

Jimmy then gave a bark which would probably have deceived a fox, but my attempt was crude, so I tried several times until I got nearer to the correct sound.

It was agreed that if we became separated we would try the fox bark instead of calling out.

As we sat talking that evening, Jimmy entertained me with stories of his boyhood days, and, as my thoughts kept wandering to the girl I loved, I asked him how the marriages of his people were arranged.

He told me that in almost every case the marriages were arranged by the uncles of the girls, on the mother's side, without the approval or consent of the girls. Once a marriage was arranged it was considered binding, and therefore love marriages were almost unknown. The men to whom the young girls were promised would belong to another tribe, and were perhaps thirty or forty years old at the birth of the girls.

"But," I said, "the girl may not like the man, and may be in love with some younger man, who is in love with her."

Jimmy informed me that this does occur occasionally, and sometimes the young couple marry, but it usually ends in tragedy, as both tribes would be opposed to an affair of this nature, and the disappointed

man would wait for an opportunity to murder the young lover or the girl. About once a year a tribe will visit a neighboring tribe, and though enemies perhaps, they are for the time being friends, and the hatchet is buried. The girls are then informed that they must marry the men to whom they were promised, perhaps ten years before. They are simply told, and sometimes forced to walk to the camps of the men, who a few days before were probably enemies. Though there is no ceremony of any kind, except corroborees, the couple are from that time considered man and wife. Hand-shaking and kissing are unknown.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Cave

In the morning, after a satisfactory sleep for both of us, Jimmy procured water and commenced to make the tea without lighting a fire. He was careful not to have more water in the billy than was actually needed, and then started to scrape over the ashes to find the three pebbles. He picked up the first one with two sticks, but I pointed out that some ashes were adhering to the pebble and would spoil the tea, but he informed me that the ashes would clear and improve the clay coloured water. The pebbles, being heavy, quickly dropped to the bottom of the billy, but the ashes slowly sank to the bottom, and as Jimmy had pointed out, the water had cleared. The hot pebbles had boiled the water, and the tea was then made, and we had the satisfaction of knowing for certain that no smoke had arisen from our camp that morning.

There had been a heavy shower of rain shortly after daylight that morning, but the sun was shining brightly when we resumed the journey. I noticed that the animals and emus seemed far more plentiful,

and on mentioning this to Jimmy, he looked at my boots and with a smile said :

"No makem noise."

The explanation was that when dry, the leaves and twigs when stepped on would crackle and break, but when wet would bend and make no noise.

As we tramped over the rough country, I asked Jimmy if he thought we would reach the sheep that day, and he replied :

"Yes, when sun near mountain."

At about five o'clock that afternoon, Jimmy pointed to a deep hollow, shaped like a huge basin or amphitheatre, with high hills on all sides, and said :

"See 'em sheep, eat grass."

"Can you see any of the sheep?" I asked.

"Yes, big lot." was his reply.

When we reached the sheep we found Mr. Graham had been right in suggesting that the ear marks would probably be tampered with. But we had even better evidence that the sheep belonged to "Murrumbar," because Mr. Graham's brand, G, was on some of the sheep which belonged to the last lot stolen. There was nothing further to be done that evening, than to make camp in a safe place, and Jimmy was most careful in every way.

As we made for a dense growth of trees he was watching for footprints. When we reached the place he considered a favourable one for the camp, he made a circuit of it, looking for footprints or tracks made by men, but found none. He came back quite satisfied that our camp was nowhere near where the thieves were camping. We lit a fire that evening, but it was a small one in a hole made by the tomahawk,

and it could not be seen from a distance of a few yards. We spent most of the evening talking over the best thing to do now that the sheep were found. One thing we agreed on, that it would be a bigger job driving the sheep out of the mountains than bringing them in. Before it could be done, the thieves would have to be lodged where bread and water was supposed to be the main diet. We arranged that Jimmy would leave early in the morning with food and water to last one day, and search for the robber's camp, returning in the evening, if not before.

Shortly after daylight he left on his dangerous mission. Jimmy had no illusions as to the difficult task before him, but he knew it was his job, and that a mate would be a hindrance, not a help. He started to circle the sheep, keeping to the hills overlooking the flat below. His objective was a track used by the thieves, and then he would follow it until he came to their camp, when he would keep under cover, and try to find out who the thieves were. Once this was ascertained he would return and talk the matter over with me.

Jimmy's luck at first seemed to be out, for he had almost completed the circle, and was beginning to think he had failed on account of rain having washed out the footprints, when he found a track showing the faint print of a man's boot. He at once started to follow the winding track leading from the hollow. His position was now perilous, for should he be detected by one of the thieves, he could expect to be shot down without any questions being asked. He seemed to be in an uninhabited land, except for the small and almost invisible trail which

wound about, but led away from the sheep. He followed the track for about two miles, when it became more distinct, and at the same time he experienced an uncomfortable feeling, as if the risk was becoming greater. But he determined to see the matter out, and continued his advance, and then, all of a sudden, he was out of the forest and on a stony plateau. He was now in the open, and the track over stone was hard to follow, but presently, as he followed the scratches on the stone, he was surprised to see a small path or alley between high cliffs. He could see by the marks and scratches on the stone that the trail led down the alley, and he now felt he was nearing his goal. Moving slowly and silently down the alley made by nature, he had covered about fifty yards when the marks ended. Then, as he stood puzzled, wondering what he should do, he heard the faint ticking of a watch. It seemed to him that the high stone cliffs on both sides were solid, and that he must be making a mistake in thinking he heard a watch ticking. He listened intently, and was now sure of it, and then his sense of smell came to his aid, for the faint smell of stale tobacco smoke came to him from the left hand side of the alley. He realized that a cave must be very close to where he was standing, and considered his best plan was to find a hiding place, so that he could watch and learn something of the cave, and its occupants. He quickly picked out a spot where large boulders were tumbled together at one side of the alley. Crouching behind the huge blocks of granite, he found he could see the alley by peering through the crack, where the uneven boulders met.

It was now past mid-day, and Jimmy ate his lunch, after which he decided to remain in his cramped position until it became dark. The sun was beating down on him, and it was extremely hot, seeing he had no overhead protection, but he knew that later on in the afternoon the cliffs would act as shelter from the sun.

Hour after hour crept slowly by without anything of importance happening. Darkness was setting in when he heard a man's voice, and presently two men came to the mouth of the alley, and approached in his direction. He quickly recognized the outlaw and his companion Red Walton. After they had advanced a few steps down the alley, Hall stooped and carefully arranged something at the side of the path. Jimmy, watching intently, had no idea that it was a man trap, and that he was likely to be the first victim. When it was fixed to Hall's satisfaction, the two men came on to the point where Jimmy had heard the watch ticking. Bending down, Hall moved to one side a large flat stone which had been in the center of the path, and then let himself down into a hole which seemed about five feet deep. After Hall had disappeared, Walton dropped into the hole, and sliding the flat stone into position again over the aperture, vanished from sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Plot

After a short time, Jimmy heard voices coming from the cliff where he had heard the watch ticking, and it was now safe for him to leave his hiding place, as darkness had set in. Cautiously he crept to where he could hear the men talking, and heard Red Walton say :

"I 'ope you 'ave some good grub, Joe, as I'm 'ungry enough ter eat a dead 'orse."

Hall replied : "Yer won't complain directly, as I cooked a leg of mutton last night, knowin' yer would be comin' terday."

Jimmy could hear plates and knives being handled, and then nothing of importance was said for some time. While silence reigned, Jimmy manoeuvred to improve his position in the hope that he would get a glimpse of the inside of the cave. Above his head he saw a faint streak of light. Climbing up and stepping on to a small ledge, he could see the cave through a narrow crack. The two men were seated at a rough table, and Jimmy could see them feasting hungrily, but they had no chance of seeing him, as

he was out in the darkness. The cave was about the size of a big room in a house, and was lighted dimly by a candle standing in a bottle on the table.

Presently Hall asked :

"Wot is the latest news?"

"Nothin' much." replied Walton.

"Yer must 'ave some news, besides, I've not been comfortable since I 'eard that blasted nigger 'as disappeared from the station. Did you see Carew as arranged, and 'as 'e found out anythin' further?"

"Yes, I saw 'im, and 'e says Jimmy is still missin'."

"Well, I don't like it," Hall said, "and I believe now yer was right when yer said that we was not safe while both the Ranger and the nigger are free ter plan and scheme against us. I ain't frightened of either of them on their own, but when they are workin' tergether they ain't ter be 'eld cheaply, and I reckon it was a bad day's work for us, Red, when yer walloped that blasted black and narked them both."

"Oh, stop yer 'arpin' and preachin', as if yer was a saint, and besides, yer would not agree when I said we would draw lots who would shoot 'im. The fangs of the Ranger would be drawn if 'is friend Jimmy was four feet under the sand, as 'e would be now if I 'ad my way."

"Well, Red, I now see yer was right, and it's never ter late ter mend, so if yer still willin' ter draw lots I am willin', but first of all, who will be the target, the Ranger or the black? Either will do fer me."

"Yer are wrong there, Joe, as the blackboy is the dangerous one. Besides, if we could arrange ter shoot 'im and bury 'im without leavin' any trace, it

would be thought 'e 'ad listened ter 'the call of the bush,' and cleared out to the blacks. If we shot the Ranger, or if 'e disappeared, then suspicion would rest on me and yer, as all know we 'ave a grudge against 'im."

Hall replied: "I 'ate that blasted meddlin' Ranger, and would like to put a bullet through 'im and settle 'is 'ash fer good, but 'ave it yer own way. We'll settle the little black devil first anyway, so come on Red, let's draw lots ter see who does the job, and get it over."

The outlaw then stooped down, and picking up a stick about six inches long from the floor, broke it in two. Holding out the sticks, partly concealed in his hand, to Walton, he said:

"Take yer pick, and the one 'olding the short stick kills the little black swine."

Walton hesitated for a few seconds only, and then said:

"I agree." at the same time drawing a stick from Hall's hand. It proved to be the longer, and the job of killing Jimmy, fell to the outlaw. Needless to say, Jimmy was intensely interested, and stayed on, hoping for further information.

"Red," said the outlaw, "did Carew 'ave any idea where the black boy was?"

"No, and though 'e 'ad 'is meals in the men's 'ut, accordin' ter the arrangements made with Graham when Carew took the fencin' job, 'e couldn't get no inklin' of the black's movements."

"Well, Red, you 'ad better see Carew termorrow, as I can't stand the strain, besides Graham may miss

the sheep, and ask the little nigger ter look fer tracks, and then we would be in the soup."

"I must say, Joe, that yer are a —— to worry. Yer know that we could not 'ave been more careful in no way, the night we pinched the sheep, and the ground was as 'ard as stone."

"Yes, Red, maybe yer right, but I'm nervy ter-night, and 'ave been thinkin' that, per'aps the darkie might be 'angin' around about 'ere now."

"Oh, shut up, Joe, or yer will make me as scared as yerself. I seen yer fix the trap as we came down the alley, and if 'e did foller us 'ere, 'e would spring the alarm."

Jimmy knew now what Hall had fixed so carefully, and thought that perhaps he had better get out while the going was good, but the outlaw started talking again. Jimmy heard him say:

"Tell Carew ter take a boy with 'im ter 'elp with the fencin', then if he found out where I could meet the nigger on 'is own, 'e could send 'im with a note ter yer, and yer could let me know."

"All right Joe, now let us change the talk ter somethin' more pleasant. I 'eard terday that come-back wool is sellin' at a splendid price, and it's time we started shearin' as the 'ot days is ripenin' the grass, and the grass seed will be gettin' in the wool. We can't shear without some shearin' plant, and I know a wool-shed where we can get all we want without no trouble. You and me and McNair could ride there on Monday night. No one sleeps at the shed, and we could be back 'ere before daylight, and the owner wouldn't never dream of 'is stolen plant bein' in the mountains. If we go by Emu Creek

we will save some miles. It is a rougher track, but is quiet and safe. Yer know, Joe, the sooner we 'ave the wool the sooner yer'll 'ave yer flour, tobaccer and whisky."

This talk was extremely interesting to Jimmy, but at any moment, Red Walton might leave the cave, so he decided to leave without further delay. With every instinct alive to the fact that his life depended on the care he exercised in extricating himself from an extremely dangerous position, Jimmy moved with great caution. Above, the perpendicular walls of rock were unsurmountable. Ahead, the dead end of the gorge offered no hope to the little tracker. At the entrance to the alley the man trap awaited him, but it had to be risked. From where he stood it was necessary to make only a long stride over a split in the rocks. The step was taken with apparently cat-like smoothness, but the undermined ridge of stone could not stand the strain, and next instant Jimmy found himself hurtling through space. Crash! He struck the floor of the alley with a heavy thud, and for a few moments lay motionless, partly stunned by the force of the impact. When he fully regained his senses, his first impulse was to jump up, and make a dash for the bush, but he soon realized the futility of attempting this. His acute sense of hearing warned him that the men in the cave, alarmed by the noise, were already in the alley and approaching him. They were coming closer and closer. Jimmy's only chance of escaping detection lay in concealing himself between two large boulders that stood within a few feet of him. Could he reach them in time to evade his enemies? He must make

the attempt, although he was in great pain from his injuries and had barely sufficient strength to drag himself along. He dared not stand up, or even sit up, for he certainly would have been detected. Rolling over on one side, he felt around in the darkness, and found he could just reach a projection on the rock with his fingers. Rapidly he wormed his way into the crevice between the rocks, but even as he did so, he heard the voice of Walton who was standing in the darkness a few feet away from him.

"Wot do yer think caused it Joe?"

"It sounded like a kangaroo or a large animal fallin'."

"Per'aps a bit of rotten rock 'as fallen from above." said Walton.

"Well, let us make sure, by searchin' the alley." was the reply.

Walton said: "Go up ter the dead end of the alley, and search back, and I'll go ter the other end. When we meet in the center we'll know what caused the row. If yer see anythin' suspicious, don't ask no questions; use yer gun."

"Seems to me," said Hall, "there must 'ave been some one 'idin' in the alley, per'aps it's that blasted nigger on our trail."

"Oh, give that a rest, the little darkie seems ter 'ave yer by the goat."

"It seems dead easy fer yer ter ferget that there's five 'undred quid offered for my capture, dead or alive. If there was thirty bob on your 'ide yer wouldn't be so cock sure."

"Per'aps so, but you can cut the blackboy out of this lot anyway, 'e don't knock at the front door

or come beatin' a drum, and wavin' a flag, so it's a 'orse ter a 'en it's not the darkie this time."

"There must be somethin' in the alley," said Hall, "so we'll 'ave a look."

Jimmy overheard every word that was said. He realized that to remain where he was, meant certain discovery. Crippled as he was, every movement caused him pain, but by wriggling and twisting himself along he reached the entrance to the cave and dropped into the dark hole. He then felt cautiously around till he discovered a niche in the passage way into which he was just able to squeeze himself. He had barely done this when he heard the voices of the men, who were returning to the cave. Hall entered the passage first, and stopped right beside Jimmy's hiding place. He was so near that the blackboy could have put out his hand and touched him. Jimmy scarcely dared to breathe. He closed his eyes tightly, fearing that a gleam might reach the searchers. He knew that the slightest movement would betray him to the outlaws. A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. His heart went thud! thud! against his ribs, and he felt that every instant he would be discovered. So near to him was Hall that Jimmy fancied he must hear the thumps of his heart. The seconds seemed to him like hours, when at last, Hall walked to the other end of the cave and produced a bottle of whisky from a box, saying: "Come on Red, let us wet our throats before we part."

After several drinks, Hall said:

"I don't feel sleepy, so I will go some of the way with yer."

Then each had another drink out of the bottle, emptying it, and after blowing out the candle they made for the entrance of the cave. Walton, not knowing his bearings in the dark as well as Hall, struck a match to show the way. Jimmy, trembling with fear, thought that he must be detected. Fortunately for him, the match only flickered dimly in the damp passage way, and neither Hall nor Walton happened to look his way although they passed within a couple of feet of him. Both men then clambered out of the cave.

"Better block up the entrance, in case there is anyone about" said Walton, and thereupon the large flat stone was placed in position. Jimmy, listening intently, heard their footsteps receding in the distance, and when all was quiet, he crept silently to the opening. He tried to push the stone away, but a sharp pain shot through his wrist. He could scarcely restrain a cry of agony. His hand dropped powerless to his side, and he knew that he must have sprained or broken his wrist in the fall. The pain was severe, but up till then, he had scarcely noticed it in the excitement of avoiding detection. What was he to do? To remain in the cave till Hall returned meant certain discovery, and yet he was unable, try how he would, to dislodge the heavy stone. He groped around in the darkness trying to discover something with which to lever it aside, but before he found anything suitable, he heard footsteps approaching. Jimmy knowing it would be Hall returning, felt that if he was destined to escape, now was the time.

Holding his tomahawk in readiness, he waited for Hall's feet to touch the floor of the passage way. As soon as this happened, he struck the outlaw a quick blow with the handle of his tomahawk directly behind the knees, and Hall instantly collapsed. Before the outlaw could rise, Jimmy painfully scrambled through the opening, and ran for his life. He had gone only a few yards when he heard Hall cursing and yelling :

"Stop ! whoever yer are, or I'll shoot."

This made Jimmy run all the faster, and immediately a revolver shot rang out, and he heard a bullet whistling past his ears. In his excitement he forgot the man-trap. Suddenly his foot came in contact with a cord drawn tightly across the dark path-way, and he was thrown violently forward. Probably the pace he had been making saved his life. A large stone, held in position overhead by a stick to which the cord was attached, crashed down just missing him. For a few moments he lay still, and then, on his hands and knees, crawled out of the alley. As soon as he reached the rocky plateau, he slowly raised himself, and made for the bush. He could hear Hall approaching, but apparently the drink and the fall had confused him, for he was cursing in a drunken manner, and scarcely seemed to know what he was doing. On reaching the cover of the trees, Jimmy, though in pain, moved smoothly through the dark forest, and knew he was at last safe from the ruffian's attacks.

CHAPTER XX.

Bush Oysters

Although clear of the outlaw, Jimmy was still to be tested, as he could not follow in the darkness a track which was almost invisible in the daytime. His task of reaching camp in his injured condition was a difficult one, as it was over two miles distant, through a forest of trees and scrub with nothing but the stars to guide him. After battling for several hours, he thought that for once he had lost his way, when, suddenly, he found himself on the hill overlooking the flat where the sheep were grazing. Jimmy now had little trouble bearing in the right direction for the camp, and as soon as he was within distance to test his mate, he gave the pre-arranged fox call. Sure enough back came the welcome answer, because at once Jimmy's trained ear told him the return call was not made by a fox.

Jimmy then gave a further exhibition of his wonderful skill, for, though I was expecting him and listening for any sound that would tell me the direction from which he was approaching, I heard nothing until he stood beside me. For nearly eighteen

hours I had waited with nothing to do, knowing that Jimmy was facing danger, and the suspense I had endured was one of my worst experiences. Greatly relieved to see my little friend back, I held out my hand, saying :

"A fox bark in the future will be music to me, for I was thinking you had found trouble before I heard the welcome call."

I thought Jimmy must be hungry, so said to him :

"Your news can wait until we have a meal, for although it is nearly midnight, I could not eat this evening until I knew you were safe."

Soon the billy was boiling, but to my amazement, Jimmy, who had hardly spoken, refused to eat anything.

"Is anything wrong, Jimmy?"

"Surely you are not wounded?" I enquired.

"No, me fall on rock."

Then he told me a little of his experiences, and all thought of a meal went from my mind. I promptly started bathing his wrist with cold water, and after that tried hot water until the pain was relieved and the swelling had partly subsided. He then complained of a pain near his ribs, and I was afraid he might be hurt internally. Instantly I thought of Miss Graham's anguish should Jimmy die. Hurriedly I gathered bush feathers (gum leaves) and made a soft bed for him. Then placing him on the crude bed with my pillow under his head, I asked him to do his best to sleep. He tossed about for some time, and then to my great relief he fell into a sleep, though a very troubled one. I sat along-side my friend until the first streaks of daylight came, when Jimmy awoke, and to my delight,

asked for something to eat. When he had eaten a small meal, he said :

"Me not sick fella." He then related his sensational experiences, and naturally I was delighted at the success of his mission.

I considered that rest was necessary for Jimmy, so decided not to move our camp until he was quite fit to travel. While resting I was thinking out a way of out-witting the outlaw.

As we had run out of meat I caught a sheep and killed it, which gave us a plentiful supply.

After resting for two days, Jimmy seemed quite recovered, although I noticed he ate hardly any breakfast before we started on our return journey. Our way back was over more mountainous and rougher country than previously, as Jimmy knew, by taking a short cut we could shorten the journey by several miles. We were walking as before, Jimmy about fifteen yards in advance, but I noticed that the blackboy seemed weary, and his pace was gradually becoming slower. Then apparently realizing he needed something to stimulate him, he commenced looking to the right and left, as if searching for something. Within a few minutes he must have seen the object of his search, for he walked to the right for a short distance, and stopped at a tree which appeared to be dying. The upper branches seemed already dead, but the lower limbs were green. He at once started pulling large strips of bark off the tree, although I had no idea why he was doing so. When I reached the tree, he had a considerable surface of the trunk free of loose bark. Then to my surprise he commenced collecting large white wood-grubs, between

two and three inches long, which seemed to be fairly plentiful. When he had gathered over a dozen he made a small fire under some tall trees, and placed the grubs on a flat piece of sodden bark and roasted them slightly. Then he sat on a log and commenced his primitive feast. He first placed the roasted delicacies on the ground within reach, and picked up one of the largest. Holding it in his fingers, he bit both ends off and spat them out. Then he sucked hard and apparently enjoyed swallowing the contents until the outer shell only was left, which he threw away. He ate the lot, and then looking at me said :

"Not sick fella now, plenty strong."

I was very surprised at what I had seen, and said to him :

"What do they taste like?"

"Good, likem nuts, likem butter, black fella eatem plenty." he replied.

Sure enough when we started walking again, he seemed to have regained his strength, and the "bush oysters" had proved their worth.

As the heat affected our supply of mutton, Jimmy said he would get a 'possum. I thought it interesting while he was looking for a 'possum's nest. Instead of looking up at the branches of the trees, as a white man would do when looking for a nest resembling a sparrow's, but much larger, he kept his eyes on the ground, and on the trunks of trees. He was apparently looking for the scratches which 'possums make, and when the tell-tale signs were found, he looked up and sure enough the large nest was easily located. Climbing up the tree with the greatest of ease, he put his hand into the nest and pulled out a 'possum. With

a quick movement he killed it by dislocating its neck. When Jimmy reached the ground, I said to him:

"Is the 'possum a ring-tailed one?" and he answered:

"Yes, big (gray) 'possum no make nest."

While I was inspecting his catch, he told me that the ring-tailed 'possum is only about half the size of the gray 'possum. Should it be fired at and wounded when up a tree, it will entwine its tail around a small limb and hang there head-down, apparently without any inconvenience to itself. The large gray 'possum cannot protect itself in this way, but can fall from the top of a high tree without injuring itself. It simply curls itself into the shape of a ball and bounces from the ground unharmed.

As we walked along I noticed Jimmy looking at the flowers which, in places, were growing in rich profusion.

Presently he said:

"Plenty bees longa flowers, plenty 'oney."

Noticing a tiny pool of water, he at once turned off his course to examine it. I did not know why, but when I looked closer I could see the bees on the mud near the water's edge. The bees were drinking or rather sucking the moisture from the mud. Jimmy knew that as soon as a bee had sufficient liquid, it would rise and circle before making straight for the hive, and by watching it in its flight he would know the direction of the hive. The forest being dark and shadowy, it was rather difficult to keep the bee in sight, so Jimmy opened the flour bag and taking a pinch of flour in his fingers, sprinkled it on the bee. When it rose from the mud I noticed it circled only

once before starting for the hive, and Jimmy knew by this that the hive was close at hand. Had the hive been a considerable distance away, the bee would have circled several times to attain altitude. On account of its white appearance the bee could be seen quite plainly until it was out of range. He now knew the direction he had to take to reach the bee hive, and on walking a short distance he stopped and looked at a hole high up in a gum tree. After looking at it for a few seconds, he shook his head and prepared to move on.

"Is that a beehive?" I asked.

"Yes, 'im bee-hive, no smoke, no axe."

Jimmy had found the hive, but on account of being unable to smoke the bees out, and as we did not have an axe, we had to do without the honey.

After several hours of walking, we came to a small mountain stream where Jimmy said he would get some fish for dinner, in case I did not like grilled 'possum. Jimmy had no hooks, and I understood from him that the blacks never had anything in the form of hooks before the white man came to Australia, because they could get fish easier in their own way. He now looked for a gum (eucalyptus) tree with low branches, and when he found a suitable one, he broke off some of the branches with the most leaves, and carried them to a tiny but deep pool where he knew the small black fish were. Throwing the branches into the water which was quite warm near the surface, he left the pool and started gathering acacia wood for a fire. When the tea was made, Jimmy went back to the black-fish hole with his spear in readiness.

Looking into the water he could see blackfish, slowly rising towards the surface as if drugged, then he used the spear. When he had speared six rather small fish we cleaned and grilled them, and with the 'possum meat enjoyed a good dinner.

Though habitually quiet, Jimmy was always considerate. Thinking I might find the flavour of the 'possum meat rather rank, he had made cuts in the portion intended for me; experience having taught him that doing this, robbed game of some of its rank flavour. Jimmy told me the blacks frequently got fish by the method he had just used. When I pointed out that it was wasteful, as probably the remaining fish in the hole would die, he told me that his people did not worry about small things like that, as game of some sort was always plentiful, if not in one district, then in another. I asked Jimmy how his people thrived without vegetables, and he told me that they ate different kinds of plants, roots and berries. The sarsaparilla plant was valued by them as medicine. Knowing I was noticing the lack of fruit and vegetables, he said he would find some berries that evening, and true to his word, he found some wild berries which I thought delicious.

We camped that night in a thick clump of trees, after Jimmy had speared a rabbit for our breakfast. When morning dawned he cheered me by saying that we would reach the homestead that evening. After a long and tiresome tramp, as the weather was hot, we reached the homestead at about 9 p.m.

Although the hour was fairly late, the question of laying a trap for the outlaw and his mates had to be decided on, and I would need to leave "Murrum-

bar" that night. Otherwise it would be known by the station hands next day that Jimmy and I had returned together. We reached the homestead on Saturday evening, and it was arranged that I should return to Stawell without delay to inform the police what Jimmy had overheard at the cave.

When the Sergeant received the information he was delighted at the news, and at once made arrangements for extra troopers to be available on the Monday. His plan was to intercept the outlaws as they rode through a gully running parallel with Emu Creek. One of his men knew the locality well, and a trap for the outlaws was quickly arranged. The Sergeant, who held a very high opinion of Jimmy's ability, asked as a favour that Jimmy and I should assist. After some hesitation I promised, on the understanding that we should act as reserves above the gully where the troopers would be waiting.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Outlaw Trapped

The evening came and darkness was rapidly approaching, as Jimmy and I took up our pre-arranged position in the bush above the gully. We knew the police were well placed some distance below us, and that the outlaw and his mates could expect a hot reception when they arrived on the scene. There being no moon, the darkness, unrelieved by any lights, became more intense, and it had a depressing effect on me. We lay quietly with every sense strained to the uttermost, but the hours passed and nothing happened. Just as I was beginning to think our plans had miscarried, Jimmy raised his head.

"Horses come," he whispered.

I listened intently, but could not hear anything resembling the tramp of horses. A few anxious minutes passed, and I was wondering if the little tracker's imagination had tricked him, when he whispered :

"Bacca me can smell."

A light breeze was coming down the valley, but I did not get a whiff of the pungent weed. We

flattened down again in the tense silence, scarcely breathing. Shortly after, came the swishing of branches and crackling of twigs as the horsemen drew closer and passed within a few yards of our hiding place. Then I was slightly startled by a good imitation of the loud bark of a fox at my side. I had forgotten momentarily, Jimmy's arrangement with the Sergeant to inform him in this manner as soon as the horsemen were between us and the police. Impatiently, and somewhat fearfully, I waited till they were out of earshot. I was about to rise when Jimmy said in low tones, "We go."

We had moved only a short distance down the steep hill-side where the horses had scrambled down a minute or two before, when with a sharpness that startled me, a single shot rang out, the echoes rattling up the hills in a series of receding sounds. Next came the sharp call:

"Surrender!"

The answer was a scuffle of rushing hoofs.

"'em come back." said Jimmy.

At all hazards we must check the retreat, and to mislead the quarry as to the numbers in the hills above them, I fired as closely as possible, random shots from my rifle and revolver. This seemed to have the desired effect, as we could hear sharp orders coming from the direction of the entrapped horsemen.

"'em jump off 'orse." said Jimmy.

I was at a loss to know what was best to do when I saw several flares not far from where I guessed the horses had been abandoned. I noticed first one and

then another, until there were numerous fires commencing to blaze.

"'em trooper light plenty fire." was Jimmy's remark.

In a short space the hollow was lit up, and I knew the police had won the first bout by having prepared large heaps of inflammable material to meet the position that had now arisen. From behind these blazing heaps, and taking advantage of all the cover possible the forms of the police could be seen moving in and out of the darkness as they endeavoured to keep the outlaws in view. Then the guns spoke out. Bright spurts of flame proved that the police were arranged in a semicircle. The riderless horses, apparently terrified by the fires and the shooting, dashed back along their outward tracks, and passed us with a clatter of hoofs as they made for the safety of the hills.

Ghastly white, the trunks of the gum trees showed out as the leaping flames sent waves of light into the blackness of the forest. The dark figures of the entrapped men showed out at times, as they dashed from one tree to another. They were now separated, and still the gunfire boomed on. One of the shadowy forms presently fell to lie prone, but the others, dodging and twisting and keeping in the shadows as much as possible, were coming in our direction. Then, taking advantage of a dark area, one of the pair succeeded in breaking through the police cordon, and, reaching the protection of the forest, was safe from capture. The other raced in our direction. As he came within range, I shouted :

"Stand !"

I stood up with my rifle levelled, but instantly,

and quicker than I thought humanly possible, he raised his gun and fired. His hurried shot, fired almost at random, missed its mark, but there was no need for me to fire, as a trooper had fired when the fugitive slackened his pace on hearing my command. The dark form sank slowly to the ground. In the excitement, Jimmy seemed to have lost all fear, and he plunged through the undergrowth to the squirming and cursing figure.

"Yer black swine." There was no mistaking the voice or the language, and he was endeavouring to rise to seek vengeance on the blackboy when I approached him. Jimmy had already picked up the outlaw's gun, and taking it a few yards away, tossed it into a dark patch of scrub.

"It's all up, Hall, you might as well stay down." I said.

He obeyed, and with a fierce muttering of oaths, appeared to sink into unconsciousness. The shooting having stopped when Hall fell, I looked down the valley, but could not see any movement in the waning light of the spent fires. At the same time Jimmy pointed toward the valley and said:

"Trooper, 'im come quick."

Shortly afterwards a scrambling figure with carbine raised, appeared. On catching sight of me he called:

"Surrender!" in the same voice that had opened hostilities.

"It's all right chief," I said, "it's Wilson."

"What have you here?" he asked, as he drew closer and saw Hall stretched out.

"Not one of our men I hope."

"Have a look for yourself;" and I struck a match.

"It's Hall!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I was afraid he had escaped. Well, two out of three, and one of them Hall, is not bad considering the darkness.

"Any police hurt?" I enquired.

"Only one slightly wounded, as far as I know." was the reply.

Hall, fatally wounded, and his system saturated with alcohol, quickly sank to his end. McNair, wounded in the leg was taken to Gumvale, and a doctor was promptly sent for to attend to his wound. When Red Walton's camp was visited by the police a few hours later, it was seen that Walton had paid it a hurried visit, and after taking necessary articles, had cleared out, apparently into the mountains.

Later that night Jimmy and I were together at the Hotel having a late supper, when a trooper named Dickson came looking for me. His first remark was :

"Is it correct that Walton is a very big man?"

"Yes, almost a giant." I replied.

The trooper thought for a while and then answered:

"That accounts for the weight behind his punch."

"What, did he punch you?" I asked with surprise.

"Yes, at the time of Hall's escape from Gumvale, but when I think of it I wonder if he held a brick in his hand when he passed me a beauty." He continued, "I would very much like to arrest Walton, because through him, I lost two things I value, namely a front tooth and promotion. I would take it as a

great favour if you and the blackboy would assist Trooper Curtis and me to find him."

"We cannot do that," I replied, "neither Jimmy nor I like man-hunting, besides it is not really our business."

"Perhaps not," answered the trooper, "but I know this, that if either of you had been punched by the big brute, you would be anxious to square accounts with him."

I glanced at Jimmy, who was greatly amused at the last remark, and replied:

"As it happens both Jimmy and I have had more punches from Walton than you have."

The trooper looked astounded and said:

"Do you mean to say that both of you have been punched by Walton and that you refuse to even matters when you get the opportunity?"

Jimmy still looked to be enjoying the talk, and the trooper, anxious to win the blackboy's friendship, continued:

"It's the only chance the three of us will ever have of squaring accounts with him, so why not take it?"

Jimmy could not keep silent any longer, and said with a smile:

"Mr. Wilson 'im pay 'im back quick."

"What does he mean?" asked the trooper.

"Walton and I fought a few weeks ago and Jimmy considers my account is squared." I replied.

"Surely you don't mean you beat him with your fists?"

"Yes, 'im boss every man now." chipped in Jimmy.

The trooper looked hard at me and said :

"Your name is Wilson, and now I look at you closely I see you resemble Dodger Wilson whom I had the pleasure of seeing win the amateur heavy-weight championship in Melbourne last year."

I smiled and said : "Are you sure I resemble him?"

"Yes, apparently you are an older brother."

"I believe I have aged during the last year." I replied. The trooper jumped from the form he had been sitting on and said excitedly :

"Yes you are Dodger Wilson, and my luck is in. I know you are a sport, and that you will not refuse to help us find Walton, and so clean up the bunch."

The name Dodger had been given to me on account of a peculiarity in my play on the football field.

The trooper, knowing Jimmy was the only one capable of tracking Walton, continued to plead for an opportunity to arrest the big man, as it would help to wipe out the recent blemish on his otherwise satisfactory record.

"Leave us for a while and we will talk it over." I said.

When he had left the room I pointed out to Jimmy that no time should be lost in bringing the ewes in lamb out of the mountains. Lambing ewes require constant supervision, also the eagles, foxes, and crows would play havoc with the lambs. We knew that the foxes, having small and dainty appetites, would kill the lambs simply to drink a little blood, and eat out their tongues or livers. The flesh on the bodies of the lambs would probably be untouched.

The task of removing the ewes would be quite safe with Walton out of the way. Jimmy looked serious for a space and then said :

"Me go longa you."

"Good," I replied, and called the trooper to tell him our decision, and to make arrangements to leave with as little delay as possible so that the tracks would be fresh. Jimmy had been told of the failure of the two blacktrackers at the time of Hall's escape from Gumvale, and he was all the more anxious to succeed in tracking Walton through the mountain forest. The troopers did not hesitate to express doubts of the young tracker's ability to track an experienced bushman through miles of virgin forest. Even to me, who knew from experience of Jimmy's remarkable cleverness, the task seemed an almost impossible one. I knew only too well the difficulties to be encountered, seeing Walton would be fighting for his freedom. The thought of gaol is particularly repulsive to a man who is used to the bushman's free and open life. Walton would have a good idea that if he were followed, the tracker on the job would be Jimmy. Undoubtedly he would realize the necessity of taking more than ordinary precautionary measures to trick the blackboy.

At noon next day the two troopers, Jimmy, and I left to search for Walton. We reasoned that Walton would select a new camp or hiding place in a mountain forest near water suitable for drinking. Being an experienced bushman, he would be able to procure enough game to supply himself with food.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Champion

Jimmy quickly picked up the trail leading from Walton's camp to the mountains, because not only was Walton a heavy man, but as Jimmy said, "'im carry swag."

All went well for some miles, as Walton was following a beaten track, and his footprints were quite clear to the tracker. We were convinced that the wanted man would endeavour to cover up his tracks when a suitable opportunity presented itself.

It was about 5 p.m. when Jimmy stopped abruptly near some fallen trees, as the footprints were no longer visible on the track. The little tracker stood still for quite a while, but his eyes and brain were working without ceasing. He was wondering which side of the track would offer the best aid to cover up Walton's tracks. Jimmy decided that the right hand was the one most likely to be used by the fugitive. On glancing once again on this side he noticed Walton's footprints evidently leading to a fallen tree. Jimmy still did not move for a space as he knew Walton would try to trick him on to starting on a wrong

scent if he could. But time was passing, so Jimmy decided to first examine the side where the footprints were visible. Walton had walked to a large fallen tree and stepped on to it, and very slowly and carefully the blackboy examined the trunk. Gradually he worked his way along the big log, as his eyes detected the faint marks left by Walton's boots. When Jimmy had followed the marks along the whole length of the trunk, he was surprised at being unable to find any more of them either on the tree or on the ground. He was satisfied that Walton had not stepped off the trunk to the ground, but perhaps he had walked on one of the smaller branches of the tree. After examining the only limbs the fugitive could have walked on, Jimmy was satisfied he had not done so. The blackboy now glanced at the sun, as he was anxious to have its aid while it was shining at a suitable angle, and it was now at its best.

He stood at the spot where the marks on the log ended, evidently puzzled. Then as I watched his face I noticed the same expression come over it as I had seen before. When the physical senses fail, a blacktracker calls on the reserve power of mental concentration to assist him. I was not at all surprised when the blackboy failed to answer a question asked by one of the troopers. His efforts to visualize the actions of Walton when he left the log, required intense mental concentration to the exclusion of every other question.

Presently he became active again, and at once examined a smaller limb about the thickness of a man's leg, running parallel with the ground at a height of about seven feet. He knew the outlaw could

not have walked on the small limb. It was possible that he had used it by swinging on it and moving hand over hand until he could step on to the ground or some suitable object. Jimmy examined the branch for the mark of a human hand, and his pleasure was very evident when his keen eyes detected the finger prints on the south side of the limb. The tree had fallen the previous year and a very delicate moss had grown on the side away from the sun. Jimmy smilingly said:

"Moss 'im cry."

A white man would not have seen the very slight stain on the wood made by the moisture from the almost invisible moss, which had been crushed a few hours before by Walton's hands. Knowing now what method Walton had used to trick any pursuer, Jimmy looked for the spot where the big man had landed on the ground. Once again he was puzzled by the absence of a footprint. The blacktracker knew Walton must have landed near the branch, and then guessed that the fugitive had stepped on to a large tussock of coarse grass. An experienced bushman would know that the thick pad of coarse grass after being stepped on, would spring back to its original position. Jimmy now looked for Walton's next step and found the tell-tale scratches on a large piece of bark. From it the big man had stepped on to another log, and then on to rough tussocks and grass trees, and from these to a stony ridge. The bushman had put up a really good fight to prevent anyone from trying to follow his trail. Unfortunately for him he was up against a champion whom he could not trick, notwithstanding all his painstaking efforts.

When the light failed, a suitable camping spot was found, and in the morning Jimmy started his tracking again. That evening at about four o'clock, Jimmy told us he had a good idea where Walton was camping, and after another hour of tramping we approached a small creek. As we topped a rise which sloped to the creek with Jimmy about fifteen yards in front, we could see the depression. The water was not visible as the forest almost reached to the water's edge. The blackboy stopped and beckoned us to come to him. For once Jimmy's judgment was at fault, for although he understood the art of concealing himself from observation, his companions did not. We had covered most of the short distance separating us from the blackboy, when the latter saw Red Walton down near the creek bed. Walton saw our party at the same time. He hurriedly dropped his fishing line and snatched up a gun. Without losing a moment he made for the cover of some thick bamboo. Jimmy wished to keep in touch with him, if possible, so promptly said:

"Me find 'im."

Then to our amazement he simply disappeared from view. The troopers were astounded by "the disappearance trick" as they called it. I knew from experience his ability to use the forest undergrowth and trees as a screen to hide his movements. There was nothing for us to do but to wait until Jimmy returned. About two hours later he re-appeared without any warning of his approach. He reported that the noise Walton made in his desperate effort to place distance between himself and his pursuers

made the task of following him an easy one. Walton had entered a bamboo patch, but being broad and big, could not make progress through its dense mass of stems. He did not persevere with the bamboo but quickly left it for some dense scrub. Jimmy, moving silently, heard almost every step that was taken by the big man. Of course, Walton's size handicapped him greatly, whereas the blackboy's spare frame and feet pointing slightly inwards, made his task a simple one. Jimmy had no fear of Walton discovering his presence, for sound was the main factor in the uneven contest. He knew that Walton would soon tire, as the thicker the scrub the greater the difficulties of quick forward movement. Walton did not have the least suspicion that he was being followed, as he believed he had not been seen by any of the party. Even if he had suspected that the noise he made would help anyone in pursuit of him, he was powerless to prevent it. When he left the thick scrub, Walton entered a forest of very tall trees, with Jimmy smoothly following in his wake. Then, without any warning, all sounds ceased and the forest seemed extra silent. Now Jimmy's task was made more difficult as he had to discover what had happened. He knew the direction of the spot where the sounds had ceased, and with great care he approached it.

On looking ahead he saw something that puzzled him; leaning up against a large hollow stump was Walton's gun, but there was no sign of the owner. Jimmy wondered if Walton was sitting behind the stump but reasoned that if so, he would have the gun with him. While the tracker was hesitating what

to do, Walton's head and shoulders appeared out of the top of the stump. Presently he reached down for his gun, lifted it into the aperture, and disappeared again. The little tracker now considered it safe to return and report developments. After hearing his story we decided to push on without delay in the hope of reaching Walton's hiding place before dark. As we started off, Jimmy said:

"Find stump better way."

His idea was to pick an easier way and so save us some very difficult travelling for which we were grateful, so he started off in the opposite direction to the one we expected to take. When we approached Walton's hiding place, Jimmy suggested that he should advance alone, and find out whether Walton was still hiding in the hollow stump. We agreed and the blackboy disappeared. Soon he was back to report that Walton was still in the stump. I asked him how he knew, and he replied:

"'im move, make row, 'im smoke pipe."

We smiled, knowing the row would probably be a faint sound made by Walton moving his position slightly. We decided to surround the stump, and each one in turn was to call on Walton to surrender. We would be behind trees and Walton would be powerless to use his gun, even should he feel so inclined. A few seconds after the calls were made, Walton called:

"All right, I'm comin'."

One of the troopers called back:

"Throw your gun and revolver out first."

Both were thrown out, and then Walton came down. To our surprise his clothes were torn almost

to ribbons, and his face was bleeding from many scratches received in his last hurried flight. On reaching the ground Walton with a scowl said:

"That blackboy must be the devil 'imself."

As darkness was approaching, the party was anxious to return to the creek as water was necessary for the camp. When Walton was informed of this he said:

"I've 'ad too much trampin' already, and I'll stay 'ere."

The trooper with the missing front tooth being in command of the party looked at Walton, and then said to the others:

"Will you please leave this gentleman with me to have a little private talk." When his comrades were out of earshot the trooper said:

"I am sorry that I have misjudged you Walton, as I thought you were a big selfish brute, but I see I was wrong. You are right in thinking that we do not want your company on the long tramp back, but I regret we forgot to bring a spade."

Walton, turning colour, said in a husky voice:

"Yer can't murder me in cold blood."

"Certainly not," replied the trooper, who had now drawn his revolver, "but I am about to advance to within range of your fists and don't blame me if I shoot. Should explanations be required from me, self-defence will be sufficient."

As the trooper took the first step, Walton in a panic, cried: "I'll go with yer."

CHAPTER XXIII.

An Unexpected Reward

With the clean up of the gang, I felt at something of a dead end. Following the highly exciting experiences of the past few weeks, I could not regain the interest in my vocation that was necessary for the conscientious carrying out of my duties.

More than once I had penned my resignation from the post I held. Then would come a rush of indecision. For against what would appear to be my better judgment, my thoughts would soar to heights I could never hope to reach. Away in the background of my hopes would persist the vision of one whom Fate had placed beyond my reach, and a turmoil of conflicting thoughts would hold sway in my unsettled mind.

"If I left here now, would time and distance ease the load of longing and disappointment?"

"But even if I stayed here could I hope to be privileged to visit the one, whom I felt was all that life held worth while for me?"

"Again, how could I hope to retain even her friendship gained by circumstances which gave me

no valid or lasting claim on what must now become to me only a precious memory?"

"What perverse circumstances had brought me here merely to suffer indignities, hardships and heart breaking misery of unattainable desire?"

Then a warm flush of satisfaction would sweep over me as I let my thoughts revert to some happy moments that — could it possibly be?—meant more to me than I dared dream.

But such feelings were short lived and I would chide my own presumption in permitting such a veritable sacrilege.

Just when this admixture of day-dream and nightmare had reached the stage of a confused medley in my mind, a letter came from my mother with the information that my father was not as well as he might be, and was apparently failing. Would it be possible for me to come home to be with them?

This, if anything, complicated matters. The trouble only switched over to a battle royal between my ideas of filial duty and the pull of my misplaced affection.

At one time I would be fully determined to go to Miss Graham, and declare my feelings in the belief that her very scorn would be sufficient to drive me from her presence for ever.

Again I would attempt to brace myself with the futile hope that some strange freak of fortune might assist me to reach the summit of my heart's desire.

Then in a revulsion of feeling amounting to utter hopelessness I would endeavour to shut the whole matter from my mind.

It was during one of these lapses that I determined

to go to "Murrumbar" and discuss with Mr. Graham the matter of my mother's request, and resignation from my present position.

I fully anticipated he would advise me to go and share the anxieties and responsibilities of the position at home.

It was with a heavy heart that I rode out along the bush track that evening on an errand that both attracted and repelled.

As my horse shied wildly at some quivering shadow cast by the rising moon, I believe that had he turned his head homeward I would not have restrained him. In this mood, I reached my destination only to find that Mr. and Mrs. Graham had gone to Melbourne that day to transact some business in connection with Mr. Steven's affairs.

I was met at the small side gate by Miss Graham who gave this information. I hastily said that I would return at a later date to discuss some business matters with Mr. Graham.

"But surely you are not going away without calling in after your long ride?"

I tried to conjure up some excuse but felt so confused that words failed me, and the young lady took the matter into her own hands by calling a lad to take my horse.

We stood at the gate for a little while. Ill at ease I could only reply to her gracious chat in monosyllables that must have sounded churlish.

At last in a desperate endeavour to open conversation on my side, I jerked out :

"How is Ladybird?"

"Oh! I have hardly worked her yet but she is

as handsome as ever. I feel ever so much tempted to go for a ride this beautiful evening."

I grasped at the shadow;

"Might I accompany you?"

She laughed gayly, and replied:

"I should feel lonely going out without a companion."

She seemed to be in a merry mood that night in most noticeable contrast to her usual stately though charming dignity. Her manner carried contagion, and I felt surprise and pleasure, when, as we ambled along the moonlit track, I felt the conflict of doubts and fears that had held sway in my mind, gradually giving way to a flow of extravagant expectancy.

Down the green slope we rode to the edge of the tree-fringed lake.

"We could leave the horses here and walk along the bank." I suggested.

"I feel that I could walk here till dawn." she assented. The moon was high now, casting a silver gleam over the still water as we slowly moved across the soft green banks.

"You know, Miss Graham, that I must leave here shortly." She stopped abruptly, facing me; I thought she looked paler. Perhaps it was an illusion wrought by the white light of the moon. Or — could it be —? But I dared not encourage the thought.

"But why?"

I told her, in a halting way with a heaviness of feeling I had never before experienced, that the old folks to whom I owed so much, had called me back to be with them through their declining years.

We were both silent for a time.

"And must you really go?"

"There is nothing for me to stay for now."

"There is at least this: you have promised to guide me through the mountains."

We were standing on the soft carpet near the water's edge, and as her beautiful eyes gazed so intently into mine I felt a glow of happiness in the thought that if it were only for one short hour, we were living in a world that was ours alone.

"There are others more competent than I."

"But," she persisted, "you promised me, Mr. Wilson. You promised me!"

There was a falter and slight tremor, a pleading in her voice that touched my heart.

Then with an uncontrollable impulse that surged through me I flung discretion to the winds. Throwing my arms around her I drew the lovely form to mine in an embrace that knew no denial.

Then again as the hopelessness of my position dawned once more I gently pushed her off.

"Oh! Miss Graham, whatever have I done. How can I ask your pardon?"

But the girl of my dreams, placing her soft hands on my cheeks, again pressed those sweet lips to mine and whispered:

"You have only done what I had wished for long ago."

The moon passed over and on till naught but a silver streak illumed the little lake, and still we sat there together.

All the despair that had marred my coming had changed to a great joy, for now I felt — *I knew* — that my hour had come.

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